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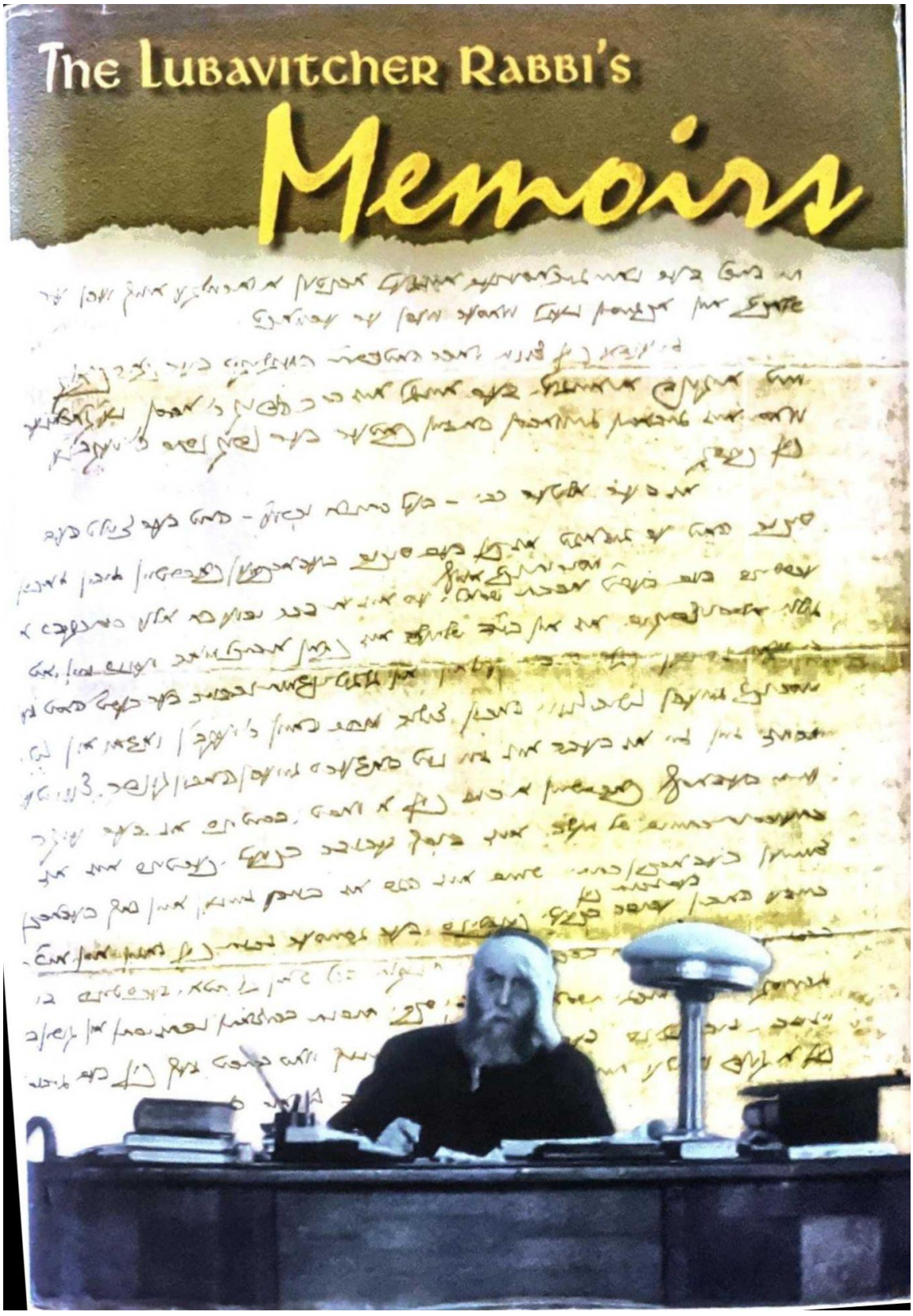
The Lubavitcher Rabbi's
Memoirs

THE LUBAVITCHER RABBI MEMOIRS 3

BY RABBI YOSEF I.

SCHNEERSOHN

English rendition by

DR. NISSAN MINDEL

The Lubavltcher Rabbi's Memoirs are a veritable treasure chest of Chassidic learning and lore, anecdotes, historical annotations and commemorations and represent the very best of Informal writing from the prolific pen of the late leader of Chabad-Lubavitch, the very eminent Rabbi Yosef I. 5chneersohn.

Known and unknown figures from the past, scholars and cobblers, princes and dreamers and giants of the spirit rise before outeyes to convey the message of Inspiration, wholehearted devotion and all-out dedication that characterized Chassidlc Jewish life In the small and large centers of Eastern Europe.

Prom the crowded pages of this monumentai book, rises the Image of an artistic personallty, a man whose dynamic power has

inspired enthusiastic action on behalf of
Torah-true Judaism wherever his word and
pen has reached

Nissan Mlndel obm, noted author and
scholar, editor and translator, has done a
remarkable Job of rendering the deeply
inspiring reminiscences of Rabbi Yosef I.
Schneersohn Into a flowing, easy-to-read English, without losing the flavor and charac-
ter of the original text,

Dr. Mlndel studied Law and Political Science
at the University of Manchester, England,
where he graduated with BA and MA and
received his Ph.D. In Semitic languages from
Columbia University. He was associated with
the Chabad-Lubavitch movement from 1940
until his passing In 1999, as an executive of
the Merkos L'lnyonel Chlnuch, Inc. (Central
Organization of Jewish Education), the edu-
cational arm of the Lubavltch movement,
serving also on the editorial board of the
Kehot Publication Society and the Chabad
Research Center.

He served as editor, for 47 years, of the pop-

ular monthly magazines Talks and Tales and Shmuessen Mlt Kinder un Yugent, published also in Hebrew, French, Italian and Spanish editions. In addition, he authored The Complete Story of Tishrei, The Complete Festival Series, The Divine Commandments, Tanya (translation), Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi, The Philosophy of Chabad, My Prayer and The Letter and the Spirit (compiled and arranged), among others. All these books have been translated Into several languages and have seen many editions. They are considered Important scholarly contributions and have become standard works In their respective fields.

PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION

THE summer* of 5705 (1945) marked a three• fold jubilee in the life and work of my venerable lather in law, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneersohn, the Lubavitcher Rabbi **שליט״א:**

a) the completion of fifty years of public service as a leader in Israel,

b) the Twenty fifth Anniversary of his leadership as the Head of the Chabad movement, being the eighth in the line of succession to Rabbi Yisrael Baal Shem Tov, founder of Chassidism, and

c) the Eighteenth Anniversary of his release from prison in Soviet Russia, where he was imprisoned as a result of his relentless championship of Torah and Judaism.

In connection with this memorable jubilee, the Editorial Board of "Otzar Hachassidim" undertook to publish a series of commemorative publications from the harvest of the Lubavitcher Rabbi's **שליט״א** pen. These include a series of dissertations in Hebrew and Yiddish, collections of pastoral letters and messages, public addresses and talks *(Sichot),* and, last but not least, memoirs, published with the authorization of the Lubavitcher Rabbi **שליט״א.**

The "Memoirs" reveal an important phase in Jewish history in recent centuries, and, particularly, in the history of Chassidism. They portray a gallery of Jews who paved the way for the founders of the movement, and who, as *Nistarim* (scholars and mystics in disguise), the ground for the movement to take root and flourish.

* ***Tammuz*** 1215

The material on which the "Memoirs" are based represents an accumulation of memoranda preserved in the family archives or in the oral tradition of the Lubavitcher Rabbis since the time of Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi, founder of Chabad Chassidism.

The present volume of the LUBAVITCHER RABBI'S MEMOIRS represents a part of his notes which he wrote in Hebrew since his arrival in the U.S.A, in 1940. The Memoirs *(Zichronoth)* were first published in Yiddish in serial form in the *Jewish Morning Journal* of New York from October 7, 1940 to February 23, 1942, and subsequently, for the most part, in book form in 1947. The first part of the Memoirs is now published in the present volume in a free and concise English rendition.

For the benefit of the reader 1 have added *The Line of Chabad Chassidic Tradition, Biographical Data* and the list of *Published Works* by the

Lubavitcher Rabbi **שליט"א.**

Gratefully acknowledgment is herewith tendered to Dr. Nissan Mindel, author and scholar, for the English rendition and glossary which he has executed with great ability and devotion.

MENDELSCHNEERSON

Chairman, Board of Editors

OTZAR HACHASSIDIM

Kislev 10, 5709, Brooklyn, N.Y.

Preface To the third volume

THE *Lubavitcher Rabbi's Memoirs* is based on memoranda preserved in the family records, a tradition of the Lubavitcher Rabbis whose custom it was to record and memorize all the events and traditions transmitted to them from father to son until the previous Rebbe.

The author of *Memoirs,* the Previous Rebbe, Rabbi Yosef Y. Schneersohn, **נ"ע** began recording his *Zichronos* at the early age of nine years and kept writing throughout his life. The Rebbe thus bequeathed us in his *Memoirs* a veritable treasure of Chasidic learning and lore, anecdotes and historical annotations. Known and unknown figures from the past — scholars and cobblers, princes and dreamers and giants of the spirit — rise before outeyes to convey the message of inspiration, love, devotion and all-out dedication that characterized Chasidic Jewish life in the small and large centers of Eastern Europe. From the teeming pages of this monumental book, rises the image of a majestic, artistic personality, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneersohn, a man whose unrelenting selflessness has inspired enthusiastic action on behalf of Torah'true Judaism wherever his word and pen has reached.

The present volume, as well as the first two, represents part of the Previous Rebbe's notes, which he wrote in Hebrew from 5700-5702 (1940-1942), during which time they were published in Yiddish in serial form in the*Jewish Morning Journal* of New York. Subsequently, most of these *Yiddishe* articles were published in book form. Shortly thereafter, at the personal request of the Previous Rebbe, Rabbi Dr. Nissan Mindel

זי״ל and his wife Nechah, ע״ה, a lifelong partner in her husband's literary works, undertook the English translation.

They have rendered the inspiring reminiscence of the Rebbe into a flowing English without losing the flavor and character of the original text.

Memoirs Volumes I and II were published in 5707 (1947) and 5720 (1960) respectively and covered a good part of the Yiddish Zichronoth. These years, as noted in the preface of the first two Volumes, marked significant milestones in the life and work of the Previous Rebbe, and of his successor the Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson. זי״ע

In more recent years, Rabbi Dr. Nissan Mindel, author and scholar, undertook to complete the translation of the last two hundred plus pages of the *Zichronoth* into Volume III. The first stage was completed on the eve of the 12[r!] of Tammuz 5760 — the HO'[1] birthday of the Previous Rebbe, Rabbi Yosef I. Schneersohn s": and the *73rd* anniversary of his liberation from prison in Soviet Russia, where he was imprisoned for his relentless effort on behalf of Torah and Judaism. The final stage has now been successfully completed on the eve of the ll[fh] of Nissan, which marks the centennial celebration of the Rebbe's birth.

OTZAR HACHASS1DIM
BROOKLYN, NEW YORK
YUD ALEF NISSAN, 5761

THE FOUNDERS OF GENERAL CHASSIDUS
AND THE HEADS OF CHABAD

The Founder of Chasidism
Rabbi Yisrael Baal Shem Tov
18 Elul 5458–6 Sivan 5520 (1698–1760)

Successor
Rabbi DovBer, the Maggid of Mezeritch
(Date of birth unknown)–19 Kislev 5533 (?–1772)

Founder of Chabad
Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi, the Alter Rebbe
18 Elul 5505–24 Tevet 5573 (1745–1812)

Second Generation
Rabbi DovBer of Lubavitch, the Mitteler Rebbe
(son of Rabbi Schneur Zalman)
9 Kislev 5534–9 Kislev 5588 (1773–1827)

Third Generation
Rabbi Menachem Mendel, the Tzemach Tzedek
(Grandson of R. Schneur Zalman; son-in-law of R. DovBer)
29 Elul 5549–13 Nissan 5626 (1789–1866)

Fourth Generation
Rabbi Shmuel
(son of Rabbi Menachem Mendel)
2 Iyar 5594–13 Tishrei 5643 (1834–1882)

Fifth Generation
Rabbi Shalom DovBer
(son of Rabbi Shmuel)
20 Cheshvan 5621–2 Nissan 5680 (1860–1920)

Sixth Generation
Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneersohn
(son of Rabbi Shalom DovBer)

12 Tammuz 5640–10 Shevat 5710 (1880–1950)
Seventh Generation
Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson
(son-in-law of Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak; sixth in direct paternal line from Rabbi Menachem Mendel)
11 Nissan 5662–3 Tammuz 5754 (1902–1994)

RABBI J. SCHNEERSOHN
OF LUBAWITZ
770 EASTERN PARKWAY
BROOKLYN 13, N. Y.
SLOCUM 6-2919

יוסף יצחק שניאורסאהן
ליובאוויטש

ב"ה, ד' טבת, תש"ה
ברוקלין

ידידי עוז הנכבד והכי נעלה וו"ח אי"א מו"ה ניסן שי'

שלום וברכה!

במענה על מכתבו נהניתי במאד מאד מזה אשר רעיתו תחי' מסכמת לתרגם את הזכרונות לאנגלית, וצריכים לזרז את מר מעקלער שי' בדבר שלוח העתונים, וצריכים לשלחם קמעא קמעא, והשי"ת יעזר לרעיתו תחי' בהדרוש לה בגשם וברוח!

בדבר בקשתו אודות עודענינים מחיי הוד כ"ק אדמו"ר הזקן, בודאי נמצאו עוד רשימות אבל מפוזרות המה ואי אפשר לי כעת לאספן ובעזה"י יבאו בכתבי הזכרונות כאשר אגמור אי"ה את התקופה של הרה"ק ר' ברוך וחותנו הרב ר' אברהם מליאזנא, משפחתו ומשפחת אשתו ומחיי ניסו הרה"ג ר' יוסף יצחק נ"ע עד ח"י אלול תק"ה אשר בזה הנני מקוה לסיים חלק שני מהזכרונות-שלפי השערתי יכול ספר שלם כמו חלק הראשון-ואז בעזה"י אסדר חלק שלישי מחיי הוד כ"ק אדמו"ר הזקן, ילדותו בחרותו נשואיו והליכתו למעזריטש וכו'.

ובכן לדעתי הנה עבודתו הכי נשגבה בתולדות הוד כ"ק אדמו"ר הזקן נ"ע יפשיך באופן שעוסק עתה ולכשיבטור להצלחה יכתוב אשר זהו רק קיצור ובמשך הזמן הנה בעזרתו ית' יעשה מילואים, והשי"ת יצליח לו בכל מה שהוא עושה.

ידידו הדו"ש ומברכו

FREE TRANSLATION

Letters *of* the Previous Rebbe, Rabbi *Yosef Y. Schneersohn, regarding the English translation ofZichronoth*

B”H

4 Teves, 5705

Brooklyn

My strong, honored and esteemed beloved friend, pious and Chassid, G-d-fearing individual *Moreinu Horav* Nissan, *Sheyichyeh.*

Greeting and Blessing!

In response to yourletter, I was extremely pleased that your wife, *tichye,* has agreed to translate the *Zichronoth* into English. We should encourage Mr. Meckler, *sheyichye,* regarding the matter, to send over the newspaper articles a few at a time. Hashem should assist your wife, *tichye,* in all her needs, both physical and spiritual.

Concerning your request for more information about the life of the Alter Rebbe, surely there are more writings available, however, they are dispersed and it is not possible for me at this time to gather them together. With Hashem’s help, they will be included in the writings of the *Zichronoth* when I will, G-d willing, complete the period of Rav Baruch and his father-in-law Rav Avrohom of Liozna, his family and his wife’s family, and of the life of his brother-in-law *HoRav HaGaon* Rav Yosef Yitzchak, *nishmoso eden,* up until the [events of] 18th Elul 5505 (1745). With this, I hope to complete the second volume of the *Zichronoth* — which, according to my estimation, will be a complete book, similar to the first volume.

Afterwards, with Hashem's help, I will arrange the third volume which will contain the life of the Alter Rebbe, his childhood, his youth, his marriage and his going to Mezritch, etc.
Therefore, it is my opinion that you continue your praiseworthy work on the biography of the Alter Rebbe. nishmoso *eden,* at your present pace. When you will successfully complete it. you should indicate that this is just a brief overview and in due course, with Hashem’s help, you will expand on this. May Hashem bring you success in everything that you do.
Your friend who seeks your welfare and blesses you.
Signature

FREE TRANSLATION

Letters of the Previous Rebbe Rabbi Yosef Y.. Schneersohn. regarding the English translation of Zichronoth.

B'H

4 Nissan, 5705

Brooklyn

My strong beloved friend, *Moreinu HoRav* Nissan, *shcyichyc*

Greeting and Blessing!

In reply to your letter in which you indicate that you accept my request — I was very pleased. May *Hashem Yisborach* strengthen your health and fulfill your heart's desires for good and for blessing in the physical and in the spiritual.

Please obtain the services of a competent and diligent typist, capable of typing the *Zichronoth* in English under your supervision — four copies at a time. The salary of the typist will be covered by my personal account and the copyright should be in the name of my dear friend {i.e. Rabbi Nissan Mindel} Please take care of this matter with haste.

I request of you to speak during the week with Mr. Meckler *sheyichye* and to inform him that I am presently getting ready the material for the second volume of the *Zichronoth.* which in my opinion will be similar [in size] to the first volume — if not more — and I hope that the transcription of half of the material will be completed within a month. I would like to know from him if he is willing to translate it into *Yiddish* and to arrange it in the same manner as he did with the first volume and if he would want to publish it in the *Morgen Journal* twice or three times a week.

In the name of the Rebbe,

Secretary

The Founder of Chasidism

Rabbi Yisrael Baal Shem Tov

18 Elul 5458–6 Sivan 5520 (1698–1760)

Successor

Rabbi DovBer, the Maggid of Mezeritch

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CHAPTER 37

THE COUNCIL OF THE FOUR LANDS

The condition of Jews in Poland—Establishment of The Council of the Four Lands—The custom of "Essen Teg"—Rabbi Yechiel Halperin —The llluy of Seitz, future Gaon of Vilna

At the time when the Jews were expelled from Spain in the year 5252 (1492), the situation of the Jews of Poland was not at all bad. They were doing well materially, were free to conduct their religious life undisturbed, and both the government and the general population treated them well. However, the hostile winds from Rome that had wreaked such havoc in Spain and Portugal were reaching Poland and Lithuania as well. The Catholic clergy there had already begun to raise their heads and assert themselves. Naturally, the Rabbis and Jewish leaders started, in good time, planning ways to avert a possible disaster for the Jews in their lands. It was decided to create a united body representing all Jewish communities of Poland and Lithuania — which were

united politically under the Polish crown — with the task of defending their material and religious welfare.

Until that time, Jews had relied on the efforts of “shtadlanim" of their own local communities. These were usually prominent Jews who interceded with thelocal rulers; some were officially appointed by their communities, while others interceded on their own initiative.

But not always were these shtadlanim successful in their efforts to help their communities.

Unfortunately, Jewish informers became more frequent, making many problems for their brethren. For every concession gained, the Jews had to pay steep bribes, making their situation very insecure.

When King Sigismund I ascended the Polish throne in the year 5266 (1506), he found the government coffers empty and its expenditures enormous. It was little wonder that the government found itself in dire straits; the corrupt tax collectors were interested only in receiving bribes, and therefore looked away when wealthy landowners neglected to pay their taxes. Only the Jews paid their taxes regularly, leading the king to be favorably disposed towards them. He even summoned Jewish leaders to reassure them that no harm would befall them from the Catholic clergy.

But this only intensified the anti-Jewish feelings of the clergy and certain government officials, who openly demanded that the Jews be expelled from Poland just as they had been from Spain and Portugal. Ugly slanders were spread against the Jews. The advantage of expelling

the Jews, it was argued, was that their possessions would be confiscated to fill the empty government coffers.

A struggle ensued between the king on the one hand and his advisors and the clergy on the other. The latter demanded that decrees be issued against the Jews, in particular by levying a separate tax on them.

Leaders of all of Poland's Jewish communities made a meeting to take counsel together. They decided to call a nation-wide meeting to inform Jew's of the pail threatening them.

It was at this meeting that the decision was made to create a united council of the Jews of Poland and Lithuania for the purpose of protecting the Jews of both lands. A committee was appointed to negotiate with the government to permit the Jews to have their own organized representation.

In the year 5280 (1520), King Sigismund granted the Jews permission to create a council to be elected by their communities throughout the land. This council was to have full oversight over all matters relating to Jewish life, which meant in effect that the Jews of Poland and Lithuania would now have their own autonomous self government.

Another large meeting was called to spread the word among all Jews of this newly granted autonomy. A representative body was duly created and called Vaad Ha'aratzos — "Council of the Lands" — which would have full control over all Jewish matters, religious and economic.

The seat of the Council was in Cracow. However, the meetings of the Council took place in various cities at the time of their annual commercial fairs, since it was then that Jewish businessmen and even Rabbis would come together.

This practice lasted for 113 years. Then a change took place. The great Rabbinic leaders of Lithuania — from Brisk, Vilna, Horodna, Slutzk and Pinsk — had a meeting in the year 5393 (1633), at which it was decided that since the Council of the Lands could not meet the demands of the Jewish communities of both Poland and Lithuania, a separate council should be formed for the Lithuanian communities. As it turned out, this council functioned successfully — even more so than the Council of Poland. The Lithuanian Council served its communities for about a hundred years.

Under the Council's influence, large Yeshivos were established in a number of Lithuanian towns, including Vitebsk, Byeshenkovitch and Polotzk.

Minsk had already been a well known center of Torah and scholarship, yet when Yeshivos were established in other towns, the influence of Minsk grew. This was due to the fact that the great Torah scholars of Minsk would now frequent those towns as well.

The establishment of these new Yeshivos brought other benefits. Since many wayfarers now started to flock to Vitebsk, for example, the community there established a guesthouse and soup-kitchen for them, with special accommodation for visiting Torah scholars.

This innovation in Vitebsk had its effect on Minsk too. As a more advanced Torah center, its Jewish community decided it ought to do even better than Vitebsk by establishing a guesthouse of its own, with particular attention paid to ensure that scholarly guests get the attention they deserved. This happened, however, only after Minsk had a remarkable experience with a youth who turned out to be none other than the later — renowned Vilna Gaon — a story we shall soon tell.

Thus, through the influence of the Lithuanian Council of the Lands, the region became a center for Torah with Yeshivos established in its cities and towns. The Council recognized that the essential foundation of Jewish life throughout all generations and eras has always been the yeshiva. The youth had to be nurtured in the spirit of Torah — and in order to learn Torah, there was a need for Yeshivos. For the Yeshivos to be successful in their mission, the material needs of the yeshiva student had to be met as well.

In Lithuania at that time, every Jewish community of fifty families or more endeavored to establish a yeshiva. It became customary to set aside a portion of all sums collected for charity for the upkeep of the yeshiva. No suitable occasion — whether a circumcision, Bar Mitzva. wedding, or even a funeral — went by without funds being collected for the yeshiva.

These fifty or more families also shared in the responsibility for feeding at least three yeshiva students from the surrounding villages. They were expected to give

the students meals in their own homes, not merely give them money for food.

That is how the custom of “essen teg” came into being. The yeshiva students would be assigned several families in town in whose homes they would eat their meals on specified days of the week.

On their allotted days, the housewives were expected to take special care of their young guests with nutritious meals — so that they should not, G-d forbid, become weak. In the selfless spirit of those times, it was not unusual for the woman of the home to go hungry so long as the yeshiva student was properly fed.

Normally, under this rotating system, each hoy ate his meals on four weekdays in one home, and on Shabbos and the two other weekdays in another. The hosts were expected to treat these yeshiva students with attention and affection as il they were their own children.

This custom implanted a deep love of the Torah in the hearts of the ordinary Jewish men and women and influenced their children as well. Seeing the high regard their parents had for the yeshiva students, the children themselves grew up with an ardent desire to learn Torah or, at the very least, to love Torah students.

It was also common for each yeshiva student to take two of the town’s boys under his wing, training them in the spirit of Torah and appropriate conduct — for the yeshiva itself taught its students not only Torah scholarship but also the essentials of fine character.

Every yeshiva tried to attract a great scholar to stand

at its head, often competing with other Yeshivos for the honored candidate.

One of the most famous Roshei Yeshiva of the time was the Gaon, Rabbi Yechiel Heilperin of Slutzk, in the province of Minsk. His yeshiva consisted of elite students, and thus it gained an outstanding reputation.

The Torah scholars of Minsk envied the good fortune of Slutzk and attempted to draw this giant of Torah to them. They offered Rabbi Yechiel not only the position of heading all the Yeshivas of Minsk, but also to become its Chicl Rabbi — the head of its Beth Din.

When Rabbi Yechicl Heilperin arrived in Minsk as its Chief Rabbi and head of its Yeshivos, a holiday was declared for the city's Jewish community. The leaders of the Council of the Lands and representatives of all the important communities in Poland and Lithuania were invited to participate in the celebration.

This gathering of the greatest Torah scholars of the day attracted hundreds of Jews from near and far. Celebration of Rabbi Yechiel's official "crowning" as Rabbi of Minsk lasted for seven days, during which time he delivered Torah lectures that astounded his learned listeners with profound insights. Other great scholars in attendance also participated in this joyous occasion by presenting their own profound lectures.

To have so many Torah leaders of the generation gathered at one place was unusual. This rare opportunity was therefore utilized for determining questions of practical Halachic law and for issuing rulings on relevant

and urgent issues, besides the lectures expounding novel insights and in depth Torah discussions.

The Jews of Minsk treated the many learned guests with great honor, providing them with special accommodations. Three different committees had been organized to take care of all their various needs.

The lectures of the assembled Torah scholars reflected the two approaches to Torah study popular at the time: "pilpul" taught and popularized in Poland by the Gaon, Rabbi Yaakov Pollack, the one time Rabbi of Prague, and “logic,” taught and popularized by the Gaon, Rabbi Sholom Shachna of Lublin. When Rabbi Yechiel Heilperin became the head Rush Yeshiva of all Yeshivos of Minsk, he himself would deliver a scholarly pilpul - style lecture twice a year, in the summer and in the winter. Only a select few scholars could attend this lecture. Permission to attend the Gaon’s lecture, it was said, was an indication that the scholar invited was himself a Gaon.

Once, the day before one of Rabbi Yechiel’s famous twice yearly lectures, a youth of about fifteen appeared in the Beth Hamedrash. He had arrived with a group of poor wayfarers who were wandering from town to town begging for charity. Like the others, the youth slept in the town’s poorhouse that night.

Hearing that the Gaon Rabbi Yechiel was about to give his renowned lecture, the youth asked permission to attend. Those in charge were shocked. Seeing his ragged clothing, which certainly did not give him the appearance of a Torah student, they refused.

But the youngster persisted, begging at least for permission to stand in a corner and listen from afar. But they refused that, too.

The determined young man managed to sneak in and hide behind the furnace, from where he listened to Rabbi Yechiel's scholarly Torah lecture. The Gaon discussed two apparent contradictions in Talmudic literature, offering profound insights into the subjects but without succeeding in reconciling the contradictions. Following the lecture, the scholarly audience continued discussing the subjects for a long time, but without, arriving at any conclusion about the contradictions.

The next day, the unknown youth, who had devoured every word of the lecture and the ensuing discussion, briefly wrote down his solution to the questions posed by he Gaon. He handed the note to Rabbi Yechiel's son, Rabbi Moshe — a Gaon in his own right — and promptly left.

Before Rabbi Moshe had a chance to examine the note, a newcomer, a merchant from Vilna just passing through Minsk, burst breathlessly into the Beth Hamedrash. He noted excitedly that as he was coming into Shul to say his prayers, he had noticed the young "Illuy of Seitz" just leaving. This young genius from Seitz — the town where he was born — was none other than the future Vilna Gaon, who was known as the Illuy of Seitz before his marriage. The excited merchant had tried to stop and greet him, but the young man — apparently on a self-imposed penance of exile and not eager for his

identity to be revealed — did not return his greeting. Rabbi Moshe sensed that this must be the same youth who, moments before, had handed him the note supposed to contain the answers to his father's questions. He promptly gave the note to his father, who was amazed at the genius it displayed. Clearly the note's author must be the renowned Illuy of Seitz about whom the merchant from Vilna spoke so excitedly.

A search was started for the young genius, in all the city's Shuls and in the poor house — but to no avail. He must have left town and was probably already on his way to Brisk together with his group of poor wayfarers.

CHAPTER 38

THE DESTINED MATCH

The young Gaon undergoes self imposed exile and suffering -Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak in Vitebsk—The unexpected decree.

The Gaon Rabbi Yechiel and his son Rabbi Moshe were soon on their way to Brisk in search of the young Illuy of Seitz. Around noon, they came upon an encampment of poor wayfarers sitting on the grass at the edge of a forest, eating their meager meal. But the young genius was not among them.

Inquiring about the young Illuy, they were told that yes, he was indeed traveling with them. However, whenever the group rested or ate its meals, they were told, he would go off on his own and reappear only when they were about to leave. No one knew what he did

during that time, nor were they too interested. The young man was generally silent and had revealed to none of them his identity.

Rabbi Yechiel and his son entered the forest in search of the llluy of Seitz. From the distance, they were struck by an awe - inspiring scene.

The young man they sought was sitting on an anthill, oblivious to the insects biting his flesh. His eyes were closed as he reviewed his Talmudic studies by heart to himself almost in a whisper.

To catch his attention, Rabbi Yechiel stepped on fallen branches. The sound prompted the young genius to open his eyes, finding himself suddenly face to face with the great Gaon Rabbi Yechiel. Taken by surprise, he realized that his secret was now out.

Rabbi Yechiel insisted that the llluy return with him to Minsk in the carriage that awaited them, so that he could receive the full honor he deserved.

Tearfully, the llluy begged to be allowed to proceed on his way. A spirited argument followed. The older Gaon sought to prove that the llluy has the Torah duty to return with him to Minsk, while the llluy countered that the Torah permits him to follow his own path. After a while, the llluy had to admit that the older Gaon had bested him and he reluctantly accompanied him back to Minsk, where a reception was planned for the next day as befitting such a Torah genius.

All this upset the llluy deeply. He blamed himself for submitting his answers to the Gaon's questions, giving

away his secret instead of staying concealed as he wished. Now, of course, they would not let him sleep in the community poorhouse. A spacious room was prepared for him and he was given new clothes as befitted him.

In the middle of the night, the llluy locked his door and escaped through a window.

Early next morning, the community leaders arrived to accompany their esteemed guest to the first minyan in rhe Beth Hamcdrash. When they found the door locked, they assumed he was still sleeping. So they waited expectantly by his door until he would awake.

Meanwhile, the most respected members of the community — including the greatest Torah scholars, led by Rabbi Yechiel himself — had gathered in the Beth Hamedrash. All were eager to honor the young Illuy.

Time passed and the Illuy's door still didn’t open. The waiting leaders became worried, they knocked once, twice and yet a third time — but with no response. One of them went outside to catch a glimpse through the window.

The room was empty. The Illuy had disappeared! He was apparently unable to bear the honor that awaited him, so he had locked his door and escaped through the window in the middle of the night.

This incident made waves in the Jewish community of Minsk and the surrounding region, where the story spread like wildfire. From then on, a rule was instituted in Minsk and the surrounding Jewish communities to watch out among the poor wayfarers passing through town for possibly disguised Torah scholars, to ensure that

they not be overlooked.

But the Minsk community was still not satisfied.

Rabbi Yechiel Heilpcrin called an urgent meeting of the city's Torah scholars, which decided to send a delegation of their greatest scholars to Vilna to give the Illuy of Seitz his due honor.

Three representatives were chosen. One was none other than the Illuy of Shareye, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak, son of the one time ignorant Jew — who later became a mystic and Chassid of the Baal Shem Tov — Reb Yaakov Kerpel. The delegation arrived in Vilna, but the Illuy had not yet returned from his self-imposed exile. They waited a long time, but the Illuy still did not return and no one knew when he would. It did not make sense to wait longer, so the disappointed representatives reluctantly returned to Minsk. For Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak, the disappointment was even greater since he somehow sensed that this young Iluy — later to be known as the Vilna Gaon — would in the future be an outspoken opponent of the Baal Shem Tov's Chassidic movement.

Already then, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak, uncle of the future founder of Chabad, was steeped in Chassidus, albeit in secret for the time being. His mentor in Chassidus — this too in secret — was the mystic. Rabbi Moshe Nissan, a disciple of the Baal Shem Tov.

Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak, the Illuy of Shareye, was held in high esteem by Rabbi Yechiel Heilperin and Minsk's other leading Torah scholars. His reputation grew to such an extent that he was chosen by the Smargon yeshiva,

where he had studied for a number of years, as one of its two representatives to the meeting of the Council of the Lands, held in Lublin during the annual fair there.

Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak was encouraged to attend this important gathering, not only by Rabbi Yechiel but also by his chassidic mentor, Rabbi Moshe Nissan, who was a mystic (member of the secret society of early Chassidim). Thus, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak began to accomplish important missions for the mystics and Chassidim of the time.

After his successful mission to Lublin. Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak's reputation in Minsk grew even more. It was clear that he was not only a great Torah scholar of noble character but also had an appealing personality and communal leadership abilities.

Minsk's own representatives to the Council of the Lands, as well as his colleagues, students of the Smargon yeshiva who were natives of Minsk or had married into these families, all spoke highly of this young Illuy. As a result, the Rabbi of Minsk, Rabbi Yechiel Heilperin who had previously been the Rush Yeshiva of Slutzk — was very friendly towards Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak, and his reputation grew in Minsk and the surrounding region.

Soon came the time for the annual fair in Vitebsk. Minsk now chose as its representative none other than the Illuy of Shareye, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak.

As was customary at these fairs, the leading Torah scholars from far and near would gather in the host city for meetings, which were an opportunity to enact rules on

issues of great significance. In this respect, Minsk and Vitebsk were like twin cities — although Minsk was more under the influence of the Slutzk yeshiva, while Vitebsk under the influence of the Smargon yeshiva.

Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak, who was still unmarried at the time, was unwilling at first to accept this communal mission to Vitebsk. Perhaps he was concerned about wasting time from his Torah study.

But his mentor Rabbi Moshe Nissan informed him, in the name of the Baal Shcm Tov, that he should go. The Baal Shcm Tov had told him that Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak would find his mate in Vitebsk. As wc already know, this was to be Dcvorah Leah, who had been orphaned by the passing of her father Rabbi Schneur Zalman, and mother Rochcl. Dcvorah Leah's brother, Rabbi Boruch, would later become the father of Rabbi Schneur Zalman, founder of the Chabad school of Chassidism.

When the time came for the trip. Rabbi Moshe Nissan arranged for another mystic, Rabbi Malkiel, to accompany Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak to Vitebsk as his "attendant." The real intention, however, was for Rabbi Malkiel to teach him Kabbalah according to a curriculum set by the Baal Shem Tov.

On arriving in Vitebsk, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak was greeted warmly as befitting a well known Torah genius who was the official representative of the respected community of Minsk.

As an eligible young man, he was offered many attractive marriage proposals. However, he rejected them

all.

Devorah Leah's uncle was Reb Kaddish, in whose home she stayed and where she supported herself as a seamstress. Hearing Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak s brilliant Torah lecture in the great Shul of Vitebsk, a daring idea started forming in his mind. This llluy would make just the right match for his orphaned niece! But how could he dare voice such a thought? True, she was of distinguished lineage and an exceptionally fine girl. Still, how can a poor orphan girl come into consideration for such a Gaon as Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak, about whom everyone was raving?

As time passed, however, it was rumored that Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak had rejected all marriage proposals offered him. Although still skeptical that there was any chance of the llluy accepting an offer for a match with Devorah Leah, Reb Kaddish took heart and discussed the matter with his wife Freida:

"He has received so many attractive proposals," he confided to Freida, from some of the richest, most learned and prominent leaders of outcommunity. But he has rejected them all. Do you think it's possible he might agree to outproposal for marriage to Devorah Leah?

Freida, however, was of the opinion that it was quite possible, for every match is ordained in Heaven. It might well be that Devorah Leah was destined to be his bride. She suggested sending a matchmaker to Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak with the proposal.

"I'm afraid," Reb Kaddish persisted, trying to get out

of it. “He might reject outproposal, which would be a great embarrassment for Devorah Leah.

But his wife had a ready answer: “We won’t send just any matchmaker, but a close friend of the family, who can keep a secret. Then, even if he rejects the proposal, Devorah Leah's feelings will be spared.”

Reb Kaddish found a trustworthy friend to approach Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak, telling him about Devorah Leah’s noble ancestry and how she had been left an orphan. The Iluy of Shareye immediately felt that, according to the details his mentor had told him in the name of Baal Shem Tov about the marriage proposal he would receive in Vitebsk, Devorah Leah seemed indeed to be the one destined for him.

That is how the match was made. During the week of Chanukah, the engagement agreement was drawn up, and the wedding was to take place in the month of Nissan.

Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak revealed to his bride that his so-called attendant, Rabbi Malkiel, was really a mystic. He arranged for him to explain to her about the mystics.

Meanwhile, an incident happened in Vitebsk that horrified the whole Jewish community and the Jews of the surrounding region. The local governor summoned the head of the Jewish community, Reb Zalman Leib, with three other members of the Minsk Jewish community council, and declared them under arrest. No one had any idea what was the reason for this, nor what had been done with them.

That same day, the mystery grew as guards came to

the home of the wealthy philanthropist, Reb Avraham Segal, and confiscated all money and documents they could find. Rabbi Avraham himself was led away to the governor's headquarters.

The news spread like wildfire around town.

Shopkeepers closed their shops, craftsmen set aside their work and the townsfolk started gathering in the synagogues. The town's Beth Din called on all Jews to fast for the rest of the day and to start reciting Tchillim.

The family members of those arrested rushed to the governor in a panic, hoping for a clue to the mysterious arrests of their husbands and fathers. But their appeals met with no response — on orders of the governor, who had commanded that they all be thrown out. Some of the women, hysterical with weeping, refused to go without knowing their husbands' fate. But they were beaten brutally by the guards and forced to leave. This caused even greater uproar, such as Vitebsk had never known.

Even the efforts of merchants and craftsmen to use their connections among high-ranking officials to try and find out why this had happened, produced no results.

A meeting was called of the heads of the community.

It was decided to declare a full day of fasting, with all stores closed and all craftsmen stopping work.

In addition, Jewish merchants who had dealings with the nobility were urged to use their influence on behalf of the arrested communal leaders to try and soften the hard' hearted governor. A special emissary was sent to the wealthy landowner, Reb Zev Wolf Ettinger, begging him

to exert his influence in any way possible to avert the calamity befalling the Jews of Vitebsk.

Meanwhile, a delegation was sent to the governor to find out why the community leaders and Reb Avraham Segal had been arrested and what had happened to them. When this delegation reached the governor's headquarters, however, they were met by armed guards, who ordered them into a room where they were to wait. The room was empty, without even a chair to sit on. The bars on its windows seemed ominous. A member of the delegation who wanted to go get some chairs from an adjoining room found the door of their room locked. To their horror, they realized that they, too, were now prisoners!

A great fright gripped them. This must be part of some terrible conspiracy against the Jews, they realized. But no one knew what it was all about. Although all were experienced community leaders, in that locked room they were at a total loss as to what to do.

CHAPTER 39

TROUBLED TIMES IN VITEBSK

A calamitous time for Vitebsk—A disturbed Rosh Hashanah —The attitude towards the Jews.

The delegation now knew for sure that they. too. were arrested. They found it deeply perturbing; clearly there was some kind of false accusation, which seemed to spell the beginning of hard times for the

Jews of Vitebsk.

One member of the delegation, the respected elderly scholar Reb Shlomo Aharon, was the first to find words of comfort for his comrades: “Let us trust in G d, the Master of the Universe. We must repent and call upon our Heavenly Father, Who will surely protect us from any evil.”

To strengthen the faith of his younger comrades, Reb Shlomo Aharon told them of a similar event that had occurred in the same town of Vitebsk some ninety years earlier.

It happened when his grandfather, the Gaon. Rabbi Nosson Dov, was a youngster. The Jews of Vitebsk had decided to build a large synagogue in the center of town Getting a permit for such a project was no simple matter.

They had to bribe the town’s governor, Simeon Mangorka. But when the shul was finally completed, the joy of Vitebsk’s Jews knew no bounds.

Quite a few years later, Reb Gavriel Chaim, Reb Shlomo Aharon s father, became head of the Jewish community. Once on Rush Hashanah, when all Jews were gathered in Shul for their prayers, a messenger burst into Shul with an order from the Governor for the community’s seven leaders to appear before him.

As soon as they came to the Governor, they saw that he was furious. He informed them that within a few days all Shuls and Botti Midrashim in Vitebsk would be closed and all Jews expelled from the city. In addition, a quarter

of all their possessions would be confiscated by the government!

In the meantime, the governor ordered that the community leaders be kept in jail with no reasons given. News of the arrests and the decree against all Jews threw the entire Jewish community into an uproar and confusion.

As can be imagined, the holiday spirit of Rosh Hashanah that year was seriously disturbed. Jews cried and poured out their hearts. Right after Yom Tov, the Rabbis of the town called for everyone to start a series of fasts. Every Jew had to go to the community center and confess all misdeeds — for it was assumed that their sins must have brought the calamity upon them and it could be averted only by repentance.

During this time of community - wide repentance, all jews checked their Mczazolh, Tefillin and Tzitzith.

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Even the women came to the Rabbis asking for guidance for any wrongdoing.

The elderly Maggid of the city. Rabbi Gedalia Zalman, kept chastising the community for its misdeeds and urged everyone to make amends.

Members of the Burial Society made their rounds throughout the city, charity boxes in hand, with the call "Charity saves from death."

On the fourth day, the governor ordered that the arrested leaders be brought before him. He also summoned the town's bishop.

The Jews understood this to mean that their leaders were about to be brought to trial. This aroused even greater fear among them. They hurried to the Shuls to recite Tehillim, while others went to the cemetery to pray at the graves of departed tzaddikim.

When the arrested were led before the governor, thev found the hall full of armed guards. With the imposing figure of the bishop at his side, the Governor was sitting on a platform, apparently ready to start the trial of the Jewish leaders.

Reb Gavriel Chaim, who was among the arrested, knew a fluent Polish. He bravely spoke up to declare their innocence as he demanded an explanation for their arrest. "I know," he continued, "that the rest of the Jewish community is also innocent. But if someone has to be punished for a sin that no one has committed, then let it be us, the leaders, not the other Jews of the town."

No sooner had he finished than the governor made an astonishing announcement: No one had committed any sin and it had all been a mistake!

"For certain reasons, I cannot divulge the reason For yourarrest," said the governor. "Suffice it to say that you have been brought here today to be informed that you and yourcommunity arc innocent of any wrongdoing. But since I have caused you so much distress, I will, as a sign of goodwill, forego part of yourcommunal and personal taxes. I permit you now to return home as free citizens, accompanied by a guard of honor and a band of musicians."

A high-ranking officer mounted on a horse led the procession, followed by three other mounted guards. Behind were the musicians, followed by the freed community leaders. At the tail of the procession were more guards.

The Jews' mourning now turned into great joy. They felt that these frightening events had occurred to prompt them to repent. Indeed, they saw this clearly — as soon as they repented, the decrees were annulled.

Finishing his story, Reb Shlomo Aharon concluded that similarly, their present bitter situation should prompt them to repentance. The Jews of Vitebsk — including the leaders themselves, who were so mysteriously arrested — should see this as a clear sign to repent.

Another member of the arrested group, Reb Ezriel Yaakov, upon hearing Reb Shlomo Aharon's story, added some interesting details.

As it turned out — becoming clear only later — these frightening events that had happened in Vitebsk a generation earlier, came about as a result of a wager between the governor and the Catholic bishop of the city The governor had challenged the priest that Jews were more devoted to their faith than the non Jews to theirs, blaming the religious leaders for this. The priest, however, insisted that the Jews' faith was superficial and that they were far from righteous. Give them a good scare, he declared, so they should think that their G d has deserted them, and they would soon reject Him.

The two decided to frighten the Jews by arresting their leaders and decreeing that the Jews had to leave Vitebsk.

During the three days of their arrest, while the town's Jews were under the terrifying impact of the evil decree, the governor and bishop had sent agents among the Jews to see how they were reacting.

The priest’s prediction was soon disproved. The Jews had turned ever closer to their Creator with fervent prayers and improved conduct. Having won the wager, the governor released the arrested men and annulled the decrees.

The miraculous turn of events in that story raised hopes among the present delegation too, who a generation later, found themselves arrested. G d would surely save them now too, just as He had in the past. Hours passed, however, and the door of their room was still locked.

At long last, the door was opened from the outside. A prominent official appeared and notified them that soonhe would bring them before the governor.

However, he emphasized, the governor would not be ready to see them before he finished bathing and feeding his beloved dog.

This was but another way of demeaning the Jews, showing how the governor held his dog in higher regard than they, the leaders of the Vitebsk Jewish community.

This only lowered their spirits further.

But they did not let their dejected feelings overcome them. They waited in the new room where they were

brought to await the governor — as soon as he would finish taking care of his dog. It was a long while before the same official appeared again, this time to tell them to be ready at any moment to greet the governor with all due honor.

Finally the door opened again, this time to let in a dog, followed by his master holding a whip.

Seeing the Jews, the governor turned to his dog:

“Give these guests youthand and take from them the paper with their request, and hand it to my assistant, ”

meaning his aide who had followed him into the room.

“Find out what they want,” he ordered the aide.

The delegation explained that their only request was to learn why the other community leaders had been arrested.

The Governor flew into a rage:

“1 will reveal their misdeeds only after they'll rot in jail for a very long time,” he declared haughtily. “Only then will I let you know what punishment they will get to atone for their misdeeds. As for the tax-collector Segal, all I can say is that a harsh punishment awaits him.”

With these brief cutting remarks, the Governor dismissed them from his mansion

CHAPTER 40

THE BAAL SHEM TOV’S PREDICTIONS

The Baal Shem Tov’s emissary—The secret behind the decree is revealed — The Segal family.

Crestfallen, the delegation of the Vitebsk community left the governor's mansion. Their mission had been an utter failure. They still had no clue what ctime their respected communal leaders were being accused of, nor of their fate. Nor were the other attempts to unlock the mystery of the arrests any more successful. Some noblemen, who were on good terms with the governor and on whose good graces the community was pinning its hopes, were just then busy hunting in the forests of Vilayka, not far from Vilna.

The Jewish landowner, Reb Zev Wolf Ettinger, tried to get lesser nonJewish landowners to use their influence, but they would have nothing to do with such matters. The Jews could do nothing but intensify their prayers and fasts.

The Rabbis of the community issued a special announcement calling for a community-wide fast of men and women, young and old. On the day of the fast, the mystic Rabbi Malkicl came to Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak, the Illuy of Shareye, and told him that a special emissary had arrived in Vitebsk with a message from the Baal Shem Tov for his secret chassidim there.

In the name of their leader, he relayed to them that they should fast for three consecutive days and in every way possible try to arouse among their brethren firm faith and trust in their Heavenly Father.

This special emissary was the well known Tzaddik. Rabbi Kehos. In the name of the Baal Shem Tov, he told them that in about ten days the decree would be

rescinded and their sorrow would be turned into joy. For the time being, however, all this was to remain a secret among their select group, on the Baal Shem Tov's orders. Rabbi Kehos left Vitebsk that same day, and the secret chassidim promptly began their three day fast as the Baal Shem Tov had directed.

This was the first time that Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak became aware of secret chassidim in Vitebsk. He begged Rabbi Malkiel to introduce him to these chassidim. But Rabbi Malkiel told him he had been directed not to do so until he would receive the Baal Shem Tov's explicit instructions.

This distressed Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak deeply. He took it to mean that surely the Baal Shem Tov considered him as yet unworthy to join this special group — perhaps because he had not yet sufficiently absorbed the true spirit of the Baal Shcm Tov's new path of Chassidut. He poured out his heart to Rabbi Malkiel, who reassured him that there must be good reasons for this, which would become clear in due time. He suggested that he write to his mentor, the mystic Rabbi Moshe Nissan, to ask his advice about improving himself so as to be worthyof joining the ranks of the town's secret chassidim

Meanwhile, an incident took place that shed some light on the mystery of the arrests. Late one night, Reb Shmerel Isaac came to one of the community leaders with important news. His work as an experienced painter and decorator often took him on many occasions to the

aristocratic homes of the very important and wealthy non Jews, even to the governor's mansion.
In fact, for the past few days, he had been busy painting and renovating several rooms there.
As heartless as the governor usually was, he treated Reb Shmerel Isaac nicely. This was no doubt because he had known Reb Shmerel Isaac's father and uncle, who had enjoyed excellent reputations as house painters before him.
Yesterday, when Reb Shmerel Isaac came to the mansion to do his work, he encountered the governor. Although his employer was in a dark mood, he returned Reb Shmerel Isaac's "good morning" in a friendly tone.
From a distance, the painter overheard a conversation the governor was having with his wife. He was threatening to "torture" the arrested Jewish community leaders, especially Reb Avraham Segal.
He discovered what no one had yet been able to find out — the reason for the shocking arrests. Apparently, the Polish government, which had its capital in Cracow, had demanded from Segal an interest-free loan of 150,000 gulden for two years. Segal, however, could only promise them 20,000 since he could raise no more than that.
Right now the Governor was awaiting the arrival of a certain Ludwig, an official from Cracow, who wa

traveling to Vitebsk to deal with Segal and the other community leaders about this loan.
Reb Shmerel Isaac felt it his duty to report this

conversation to a leading member of the community. It was the first clue about the cause of this misfortune. Now the Jews began to understand why the police had raided Segal's home at the time of his arrest, confiscating all money and jewelry they could find. They must have been searching to discover whether he had told the truth when he said that he was unable to lend that vast sum.

The governor must now be waiting for this Ludwig to come from Cracow before applying full pressure on Segal and the other arrested community leaders, as well as the other wealthy Jews of Vitebsk, to force them to come up with this loan which the government needed so badly.

If so, this forebode grave danger for all theJews of Vitebsk. They had to be forewarned to conceal all valuables, because this Ludwig was notorious for plundering Jews' possessions to fill the empty government coffers.

Several days passed, with no news about the imprisoned Jews. Early Friday evening, just as Jews started to fill the Shuls for Kabbolas Shabbos prayers, a certain storekeeper, Reb Shmuel the Tall — known by this name because of his height and strong voice — ascended the bimah in the central Shul and announced "Fellow Jews, I have good news Reb Avraham Segal and his colleagues have been set free! They are already at home, reunited with their families."

He explained how it happened. Just before Shabbos, the Jewish landowner, Reb Zev Wolf Ettinger, arrived in town. Going straight to the Governor, he obtained the

imprisoned leaders' release on his own personal guarantee.

This unexpected news electrified everyone. It came exactly ten days after the Baal Shem Tov's emissary, Rabbi Echos, had told the town's secret chassidim that the arrestees would be released in ten days. This prediction, of course, was unknown to the townsfolk, who were as yet unaware of the Baal Shorn Tov and his spiritual powers that enabled him to foretell the future.

Even now, however, after the community leaders' release, the matter was still far from being fully resolved.

Reb Avraham Segal, who was now middle-aged, was well known throughout Poland by Jew and non Jew alike. He was highly regarded even at the highest levels of the Polish government through his dealings with princes and powerful noblemen.

In fact, the Segal family's fame in Poland dated back well over a hundred years, to the time of Reb Avraham's grandfather, Reb Mordechai Aharon. He had held the government tax collecting monopoly for all alcohol distilleries in Poland and together with his partner, Reb I cvcl, often extended large loans to the government. Once it happened that they gave the government an unusually large loan on very easy terms. 1 his secured their favor with the government, bringing benefit for all Jews of the land.

Reb Avraham followed in his grandfather's footsteps and his reputation, too, grew throughout the land.

Upon his sudden arrest, when his home was also

raided, his son Yehuda Leib had immediately set out post haste in his horse-drawn carriage for Warsaw. From there he proceeded to Cracow to utilize the family's connections with powerful members of the nobility, whom he informed about the baseless arrest of his respected father and the other community leaders. Princes Radziwill and Lubomirsky, who had become favorably disposed toward the Jews from their dealings with them, indicated their readiness to help. In order to hasten Segal's release and ensure that the governor of Vitebsk and other lesser noblemen be powerless to harm him, the Princes demanded that Segal be awarded the title of "Knight"

CHAPTER 41

FROM SORROW TO JOY

A new libel—Reb Zev Wolf Ettinger, the "Shtadlan"—From sorrow to joy.

That Shabbos morning, while the Jews of Vitebsk were gathered in their Shuls for prayer, all the town's church bells suddenly started ringing. As everyone knew, that meant a call for all nonjews to gather in the cathedral to hear their bishop's sermon. ı he Jews of course did not attend. But they sensed new trouble brewing. Whenever there was trouble, it was always the Jews who suffered.

Before Shabbos, the Jewish community leaders and the wealthy tax collector Reb Avraham Segal, had been released from prison on the personal guarantee of the rich

landowner, Reb Zev Wolf Ettinger. But the matter was far from being entirely resolved. The governor still found cause to be furious with the Jews of Vitebsk and was burning to take revenge on them.

Sensing that a new calamity was about to befall them, the Jews rushed home alter Shabbos prayers, staying locked indoors all day not daring to appear outside.

It soon became known that the bishop's sermon was, as expected, inflammatory against the Jews. He was doing the bidding of the Governor, who, on hearing that the Jews had sent to Cracow for help, realized he might suffer unforeseen consequences.

The governor therefore needed to create a new situation to stir the masses against the Jews.

So the priest's sermon became a tirade of false accusations against the Jews. He accused them of cheating the aristocracy by buying their produce at a fraction of its worth and then robbing the poor masses by charging them exorbitant prices for basic necessities. The Jews were getting richer and richer by the day, he raged, and something drastic must be done about this intolerable situation.

His whole sermon was a thinly veiled call for a pogrom. It seemed inevitable. The masses would surely soon force their way into Jewish homes and shops to reclaim that which they were convinced was rightfully theirs.

Such a chaotic situation would provide the Governor with a legitimate excuse to explain to the government in

Cracow why he had come down hard on the Jews. It would seem that there was no other way to control the masses' fury against them. With all his efforts he had apparently been unable to restrain them, which is why attacks on the Jews were still continuing.

Once the details of this hate filled tirade became known to the Jew's of Vitebsk, a hue and a cry could be heard in every Jewish home — where the residents had secured themselves throughout that day.

The pogrom could break out at any moment — no one knew for certain.

It was rumored that the bishop ended his sermon with an announcement for the people to gather again the next morning, Sunday, for yet another important message

This at least gave them some respite, for although I they could expect a pogrom, it would not take place until the next day. This was but a fleeting comfort for the threatened Jews of Vitebsk.

The news reached the young llluy, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak, who waited for the prediction of the Baal Shem Tov to be realized. The Chassidic leader had accurately foretold how the arrested community leaders would be released. But now there was a new misfortune - this time for the entire community. How did this fit in with the Baal Shorn TOY'S prediction?

Yet the young llluy believed with perfect faith that this too would soon be resolved. He would have liked to comfort his brethren and restore their Shabbos joy by telling them of the Baal Shem TOY'S prediction, but he

respected his master’s wishes not to publicize it. The time had not yet come for the Baal Shem TOY’S greatness and prophetic powers to be revealed. And so Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak kept the secret. He spoke about it only with his fiancee, Dcvorah Leah, and the few mystics and secret Chassidim of Vitebsk.

I

It did not take long for bis strong faith and that of the other Chassidim of Vitebsk to be vindicated. Later that same clay, the town's church bells rang again for the people to gather in the cathedral once more. Now, however, everyone realized that the second tolling of the bells indicated a change. The first time the bells had sounded solemn and foreboding, while now they had an almost festive ring.

What could it mean? The Jews, still hiding in their homes, could hardly conceive that somehow the danger had suddenly abated. Could it be a ruse of their enemies to raise their hopes and lower their defenses, so that later they could more easily attack and murder them and plunder their possessions?

It took a while till they discovered what had happened. As it turned out the Jewish landowner Reb Zev Wolf Ettinger had played a major role in the positive turn of these frightening events. After successfully negotiating the release of the community leaders, he had stayed for Shabbos in Vitebsk.

He promptly set about convincing the governor to abandon his murderous scheme against the Jews. Since

Ettinger wielded considerable influence through his strong political connections in Poland and Lithuania, he was confident that the governor would accept his suggestion on how to save face with both the Jews and the government officials. He suggested that the governor do this by dealing decently and mercifully with the Jews. Ettinger was still in the middle of speaking with the governor, when a courier came in to announce the imminent arrival of one of the highest noblemen in the Polish government. He had been sent from Cracow to investigate the entire matter of the arrests of Reb Avraham Segal and the community leaders.

The governor suddenly realized how much he would now need Ettinger's help to put in a good word for him. especially as he was aware that the government representative soon arriving knew Ettinger and would be inclined to listen to him. In addition, the governor had another task before him — to start planning a suitable reception for this distinguished guest to his town

This then was the reason for the cheery tone of the church hells the second time. They were a call to everyone, Jew and non Jew, to come out in their holiday best to greet the honored nobleman. The Governor sent word throughout the town with exact instructions for Jews and non Jews alike, on greeting the nobleman as he rode into town.

The streets quickly filled with soldiers, gendarmes and throngs of people in their holiday best and in festive spirits. ı he previous day's incitement against the Jews

was all but forgotten.

Meanwhile, Ettinger had prepared a plan to propose to the noble guest. To soften the official charge against the tax collector Segal, that he had declined to lend the government the large sum it had requested, the Jews of Vitebsk were ready to extend a large loan. If Segal could not manage the whole sum on his own, the other wealthy Jews of Vitebsk were ready to help.

When the nobleman arrived in Vitebsk, he was greeted by great fanfare and honor, Jews and non Jews each expressing it in their own way. The Governor could not have felt prouder, for surely this imposing reception was a reflection on his fine city and on himself.

That evening the Governor held a gala ball in honor of his guest. In recognition of his efforts, Ettinger and his wife were invited to attend — the only Jews accorded this honor.

The rest of the Jews, of course, were more than happy to forego such an honor — relieved at having escaped the impending calamity.

Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak and the other Chassidim of Vitebsk were overjoyed at the way events had turned out — as indeed the Baal Shem Tov had predicted they would.

Vitebsk breathed a sigh of relief, while Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak was preparing for his marriage to Devorah Leah

CHAPTER 42

THE SECRETS OF KABBALAH

Devorah Leah's journal—The story of Kabbalah — The Kabbalistic

works of Rabbi Meir ibn Gabbay—Intellectual Kabbalah and Practical Kabbalah

THE young llluy of Shareye had no need to leave Vitebsk now that he had found his future soul mate and would soon be married there. On the advice of his mentor, the mystic Rabbi Malkiel, in the name of the Baal Shorn Tov, he decided to stay in Vitebsk even after the wedding.

Up until the time of his wedding, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak studied with his mentor the Kabbalah and the new path of Chassidus as expounded by the Baal Shem Tov. At Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak's request. Rabbi Malkiel undertook a most unusual task — secretly teaching Devorah Leah as well.

Devorah Leah herself had been profoundly influenced by the Baal Shem Tov's new teachings, but she felt a need to become more closely acquainted with them and to deepen her knowledge.

Rabbi Malkiel would often report to Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak about Devorah Leah's progress in her studies. "She has truly outstanding intellectual talents," he said, deeply impressed. "She has the mind of a scholar, just like her mother, of blessed memory." These reports gave Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak great satisfaction, for he very much desired to have a learned wife.

Once Rabbi Malkiel related excitedly how he had discovered a treasure trove of great spiritual value in Devorah Leah's possession. It was her journal, where she had recorded her family's history, including the

genealogical trees of the families from which her parents descended. Little did they realize that this would become the distinguished ancestry of the future founder of Chabad Chassidism, Rabbi Schneur Zalman, later to be born to her brother Boruch.

Devorah Leah had written down everything her mother had recounted about their family — with her own additions besides. Following her late mother's example, Devorah Leah recorded everything she heard from reliable sources. As a result, her journal contained a treasure of information, the likes of which could not be found anywhere else.

Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak was curious to read this journal. As soon as Rabbi Malkiel brought it, he read through it and was astounded. Not only was everything written in an orderly fashion but also with remarkable clarity.

What he found particularly interesting was how the journal clearly revealed the definite division throughout the past many generations between supporters of the Kabbalah and its opponents. Not only did the journal explain the difference between the two viewpoints, but also what had led to this division.

Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak now discovered all the background details he had always wanted to know about the history of these movements. He learned about the development of the Baal Shorn Tov's new teachings, which were already becoming widely disseminated among the Jewish people and which he himself followed.

Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak added his own clarification on the subject of the Kabbalah — a Torah subject always revered among Jews, but also giving rise to much controversy.

That the Written Law comes hand in hand with the Oral Law is clear to all. The Oral Law, from the very beginning, was transmitted orally from generation to generation. Later, it was recorded in the Mishnah, Talmud etc. This part of the Oral Law, its revealed part, has always been well known to all. Yet there remained a completely hidden part of the Oral Law — the Kabbalah— known to very few.

It is accepted tradition that the Kabbalah began with Adam, the first man. Scfcr Yctzira, an early work attributed to him, contains the fundamental teachings of the Kabbalah. This work later came down to Avraham, the first Jew, and has been transmitted through the generations till outown time.

The Kabbalah has two distinct parts: the intellectual Kabbalah (Ivunis) and the practical Kabbalah (Maasis).

In general, the Kabbalah delves into the (mysteries of the Creation) Maasei Breishis — as well as the (mysteries of the Divine “Chariot”) Maasei Merkava relating to the Creator Himself.

The Kabbalah gives us some insight into such concepts as creation ex nihilo, the existence of all created things and their continued existence by being and reproducing.

The stress of practical Kabbalah is on the very powers

with which the world was created.

According to this aspect of the Kabbalah, the creative power lies in the holy letters and their various combinations, as it states in the well known saying of our Sages: “With ten sayings was the world created.” Herein lies the power of the letters, which, depending on their various combinations, can create and un-create.

The intellectual Kabbalah on the other hand, is rhe philosophical study of creation and of the Gdliness that permeates it. It delves into human thought and rhe superior human intellect.

In these two forms. Kabbalah has been handed down from generation to generation through the chain of tradition, as outSages say: The Elders transmitted it to the Prophets, who transmitted it to the Men of the Great Assembly, who in turn passed it on to the Sages of the Mishna, to the Sages of the Talmud and to the Gaonim Later it was transmitted only to a select few. This transmission of the Kabbalah teachings was always in secret — in keeping with outSages' directive that ’one should nor reveal [such mystical secrets] except to those who are discreet," revealing the Kabbala’s secrets only to select individuals.

Thus did it continue until the time of Rabbi Moshe ben Nachman the RAMBAN (known as Nachmanidcs) and Rabbeinu Bachayei ben Asher. In their commentaries on

the Torah, these two Torah giants include interpretations according to the Kabbalah. They also taught the Kabbalah

to their disciples who, in turn, incorporated it into their studies, introducing many of its concepts into their works of Torah scholarship written for a wider audience.

The intellectual Kabbalah became known in this way to anyone with enough knowledge and understanding to absorb it. Practical Kabbalah on the other hand, as before, remained a secret revealed only to a select few.

The Jewish scholars of Spain and Portugal devoted themselves mainly to the study of the intellectual Kabbalah. As a result, many works of intellectual Kabbalah emerged. The greatest of the Spanish and Portuguese Kabbalists was Rabbi Meir ibn Gabbay, author of Tolaas Yaakov — a commentary on the prayers, Dcrech Emunah— on the ten Scfiros and Avodat Hakodcsh. These Kabbalah works spread far and wide, evoking high praise among scholars.

After the Jews were expelled from Spain and Portugal they brought these works of Kabbalah with them to their lands of refuge in Italy, France, Bohemia, Poland and other lands where Jews lived. These works were received with great interest. Students of the Kabbalah increased and learned Jews everywhere studied the works intensively and enthusiastically.

While the Jews of Europe were more involved in the study of the intellectual Kabbalah, the Jews of the Eastern lands — Israel, Turkey, Egypt and Yemen — which were home to large Jewish populations, were disseminating the practical Kabbalah. Many works of practical Kabbalah appeared in manuscript and in print. They included

works on the wisdom of the palm and the face, charms and sacred Names of Gd, as well as works on the power of incantations, combining Hebrew letters, interpreting dreams and exorcizing all sorts of evil spirits.

When these works reached Europe, they were met with opposition by the learned Jews there.

For some time in fact, since the time of the RASHBA (Rabbi Shlomo ben Aderet), scholarly Jews had been divided about the Kabbalah. Some held that Torah study should concentrate strictly on the revealed part of the Torah — the Talmud and its commentaries — to the complete exclusion of the mystical part. They did not approve even of the study of the Agadah and Midrash (the homiletical parts of the Torah).

Others did encourage the study of the mystical portion of the Torah, in addition to its revealed part (Talmud and Halacha). But they interpreted the Agadah parts of the Talmud and also the Midrash according to the teachings of the Kabbalah. The first group opposed them on this, but their dispute was not deep enough to divide Jewish communities.

That dispute had been going on for several generations. Now, however, works of practical Kabbalah. which sought to penetrate the very mysteries of rhe Creation, were reaching Europe from the Eastern lands This aroused far greater opposition among Torah scholars. They saw grave danger in this type of Kabbalah for these works made study of the practical Kabbalah accessible to everyone, whether worthy or not.

To prevent study of the practical Kabbalah, the great Torah leaders of Europe prohibited study of all works of r Kabbalah, even of the intellectual Kabbalah, although in essence they were not opposed to this study.

About twenty years after the Kabbalistic works of Rabbi Meir ibn Gabbay spread through Europe, the two distinct approaches to the Kabbalah became more clearly defined: the practical Kabbalah, as taught by Rabbi Yitzchak Luria — known as the Ari'Zal — and the intellectual Kabbalah, as taught by Rabbi Moshe Cordovero — the RAMAK. Roth had Yeshivos where their approaches were taught.

Thus did these two great schools of Kabbalistic thought take root in the world of Jewish scholarship, both of them producing followers who were great in the study of both the revealed and the mystical parts of the Torah.

CHAPTER 43

FROM KABBALAH TO CHASSIDUS

The holy Ari and the RAMAK—Rabbi Eliyahu of Worms spreads Kabbalah—Opponents and supporters of Kabbalah

It must have been around the year 5368 1(1608) that the great Kabbalist, the Ari, moved from Egypt to Tzfat (Safed), Israel — a city renowned as a center of Torah scholarship and the Kabbalah.

There he found Rabbi Moshe Cordovero — known as the RAMAK — who had settled in Tzfat previously. Rabbi

Moshe was already renowned as a Kabbalist, with many disciples and a large following. Even though these two great Kabbalists — Rabbi Moshe and the Ari — had different approaches to explaining the Kabbalah, they nevertheless both followed the same common path of the Kabbalah.

In fact, Rabbi Moshe Cordovero, to a large extent, was the one who explained the teachings of the Ari. For over ten years these two Kabbalists studied together, during which time Rabbi Moshe expanded and explained the Ari's teachings. He thus made these exalted spiritual concepts easier for our human intellect to grasp.

One of the great minds who grasped and absorbed these joint Kabbalah teachings of the Ari and Rabbi Moshe Cordovero was the Gaon, Rabbi Eliyahu of Worms, also known as the Baal Shem of Worms.

At the tender age of thirteen, Rabbi Eliyahu was already well versed in these complex Kabbalah teachings. With his clarity of thought and speech and a talent for clear explanation and oratory, he began to disseminate them. Thanks to him, the Kabbalah became a subject of study in many Yeshivos of the time. To study mystical teachings, of course, one first had to get a solid foundation in the revealed part of the Torah - Talmud and Halacha.

In order to further spread these Kabbalah teachings throughout the Jewish world, Rabbi Eliyahu of Worms called a meeting of his disciples and followers to map out a plan. It was decided to form a society of mystics whose

task would be to wander from town to town, from village to village, in self imposed exile, mingling with simple unlearned folk and inspiring them to serve Gd with heart and joy. Their task would also include encouraging learned Jews to study the Kabbalah. This was accomplished after the study of Kabbalah had already been well received in the Yeshivos of such leading communities as Worms, Prague, Lublin, Chelm and Pinsk.

Members of this secret society of mystics often became woodchoppers and water carriers in order to forge close ties with simple Jewish folk while helping them in their service of G d and the refining of their character.

In their efforts to spread Kabbalah study, the mystics often used the Kabbalah works of Rabbi Meir ibn Gabbay, which had already been published and which were now being disseminated widely by these mystics. In the course of twenty years, Rabbi Eliyahu's secret society accomplished wonders, attracting thousands to the study of Kabbalah. Rabbi Moshe Cordovero's renowned Kabbalah work, Pardcs, was also published then, becoming another source of Kabbalah teachings for the mystics and their followers.

From then on, the secret society of mystics grew and expanded, first under Rabbi Eliyahu Baal Shem of Worms and later under Rabbi Yoel Baal Shem of Zamoshch He in turn, transmitted the mantle of leadership to Rabbi Adam Baal Shem of Ropshitz. It was from Rabbi Adam that Rabbi Yisroel Baal Shem Tov received the leadership of

this secret society, and under his leadership Chassidus began to flourish.

Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak was now thoroughly acquainted with the history and successive generations of leaders of this secret society of mystics that was the forerunner of the new Chassidic movement. His fiancee's journal was most helpful. Whatever was still unclear was explained by Rabbi Malkiel, whom the Baal Shem Tov had assigned to be his mentor.

Rabbi Malkiel even clarified for Devorah Leah many facts about her own family, especially about her grandfather Rabbi Moshe, whom he knew well from Minsk. Her mother Rochel had indeed told her almost everything about the family. But she had not finished telling her about her father-in-law, Devorah Leah's grandfather Rabbi Moshe, president of the Jewish community in the German city of Posen, who later moved to Poland and settled afterwards in Minsk.

Rabbi Moshe as we know, was a direct descendant of the MAHARAL (Rabbi Yehuda Lowe) of Prague. With his move to Poland and later to Minsk began the spread of this distinguished family to Poland and Lithuania, where his great grandson, Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi, later founded the Chabad school of Chassidism.

As previously noted, after Devorah Leah’s parents had both passed away, she had chosen to live with her uncle and aunt in Vitebsk. This she did so that she could be close to the resting place of her father and mother who were buried in Vitebsk, a connection that gave her much

comfort.

Rabbi Moshe, her grandfather, would have eagerly agreed to bring up Devorah Leah in his own home in Minsk. But she insisted on remaining in Vitebsk and on earning her keep by the work of her own hands — as a seamstress. This she did, even though it kept her distant and somewhat estranged from her prominent grandfather.

And so it came about, on the Baal Shem Tov's directive through his emissaries, that Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak, the Iluy of Shareye, had left Minsk for Vitebsk in search of a mate, becoming engaged there to Devorah Leah.

While living in Minsk, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak had heard much about Rabbi Moshe of Posen, in whom the city took great pride. But he had never become personally acquainted with him, never suspecting that one day he would get engaged to Rabbi Moshe's granddaughter.

Now Rabbi Malkiel was able to give both Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak and Devorah Leah much information about Rabbi Moshe, so that they became more familiar with Devorah Leah's illustrious family.

Rabbi Malkiel had been in Minsk at the time of the imposing reception the community prepared in honor of Rabbi Moshe when he arrived to settle in their city. Rabbi Moshe had not come to Minsk alone. Accompanying him were dozens of other Jews from Posen who had been forced to leave the city that had been home to their families for many generations. The Jews of Minsk had already heard of Rabbi Moshe's greatness. Whatever

details they didn't yet know, the Jews from Posen accompanying him filled in for them.

The mystics of Minsk, secret followers of the Baalci Shem, attended this reception for Rabbi Moshe. They respected him especially for his noble lineage from the MAHARAL. For obvious reasons, they kept their identity a secret from him, but they treated him with great respect, and he too was very friendly towards them.

On one occasion, however. Rabbi Moshe expressed himself against the study of Kabbalah as practiced at that time. This defined him in the eyes of the mystics as an opponent of the Kabbalah and by extension, also of Chassidus as disseminated by the Baal Shem Tov.

As a result, Rabbi Malkiel continued to relate, the mystics of Minsk started distancing themselves from Rabbi Moshe, until they avoided him altogether. Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak now understood why no one in Minsk had ever introduced him to Rabbi Moshe. Clearly, the Chassidim there considered him an opponent and were reluctant to have to do with him.

Rabbi Malkiels narrative made a painful impression on the sensitive Devorah Leah. To think that her grandfather was a Misnaged — a fact she had not known, this was all the more reason why she found comfort in the fact that her other grandfather — her mother's father, Rabbi Boruch Batlan, as he was known in Posen — was a proud follower of Rabbi Yoel Baal Shem of Zamoshch who had laid the foundation for Chassidus.

In any event, Devorah Leah was overjoyed to be

marrying a diossid, a follower of the Baal Shorn Tov, being herself an enthusiastic follower of Chassidus. She was unaware of course, that her brother Boruch — who was still in the process of wandering from town to town — was destined one day to be the father of none other than Rabbi Schneur Zalman, the founder of the Chabad school of Chassidus.

CHAPTER 44

TORAH AND GREATNESS

Persecutions in Posen—The story of Rabbi Moshe of Posen —Rabbi Moshe in Rome.

Both Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak and his fiancee Devorah Leah were fascinated by the life-story of her illustrious grandfather, Rabbi Moshe, who had been president of the Jewish community of Posen before spending his later years in Minsk. Rabbi Moshe was one of those unique personalities who combined Torah greatness with worldly prominence.

An interesting chapter of Jewish history is connected with Rabbi Moshe and the prestigious family from which he stemmed. He was a great-grandson of the MAHARAL, yet deserving of prominence in his own right as well. The whole Jewish world at the time knew about Rabbi Moshe's great accomplishments that had sanctified the name of Heaven.

From the time of the MAH ARAL and well before, Jews living in Catholic countries endured severe persecution Mainly responsible for these were the Popes in Rome —

but no small role in fanning the fires of hate was played by the local rulers and Catholic clergy in the lands, provinces, city-states and towns under the rule of the church.

To understand more clearly the harassment that Rabbi Moshe had to endure at the hands of Catholic fanatics, ultimately forcing him to leave Posen, we need to go hack several generations and look at the general conditions under which the Jews lived. These were times of harsh Papal decrees and consequent unbearable suffering for Jews in Catholic countries.

In 5329 (1569), Pope Pius V issued a decree of expulsion for all Jews living in countries under Papal rule. Only Jews living in Rome and Ancona were not included in the decree.

Only after Pius's death in the year 5332 (1572) did the new Pope Gregory XIII annul the decree and permit the Jews to return to their places of residence. However, he issued new decrees, aimed at the very heart of the Jewish people — the study of Torah and its observance.

Especially difficult was the decree forcing all Jews, every Shabbos and holiday, to attend sermons by priests at designated locations. During the twelve years of his reign, Pope Gregory employed every means at his disposal to get the Jews to hear these sermons, hoping to influence them to convert. Particularly hard hit were Jews in small towns and villages who, being few in number, found it hard to resist these verbal onslaughts and barely managed to escape Irom the clutches of the priests.

Fortunately, the Popes who succeeded Gregory XIII were not so strict in enforcing this hateful decree. But the priests had already been given a free hand to circulate among the Jews and preach to them about the founder of their religion and his supposed miracles. The sermons during their religious holidays were especially aggressive in pressuring the Jew's to convert.

The Vatican further aggravated this situation with the issue of a new edict. In every land and province, priestly hierarchy were to hold public debates from time to time between representatives of the Church and of the Jews. These debates forebode grave danger — often life' threatening — for Jews in Catholic lands.

The priests utilized these debates as yet another chance to harass the Jews, the extent of their harassment depending largely on the personalities of the rulers and priests in charge.

When Rabbi Moshe was head of the Jewish community of Posen, the archbishop there was a rabid Jew hater who made Rabbi Moshe's life a misery.

The debates held in Posen were by order of Prince Maximilian, ruler of that province, and were used as an excuse for all sorts of libels and spiteful persecutions of the Jews. These insufferable conditions led to Rabbi Moshe's decision to leave Posen and resign from his honored position there.

At that time, Posen was renowned for its scholars — in great measure due to the emphasis parents placed on educating their children to be Torah scholars.

This had been the case with the Gaon, Rabbi Yehuda Leib, head of Posen's Beth Din, who had hired the best Torah teachers for his son Moshe. When he had enrolled Moshe in the yeshiva for older students, he also chose the top faculty members there as his son's mentors. Blessed with outstanding natural talent, Moshe succeeded in his learning till he far outpaced his peers.

The young Moshe also had exceptional qualities of character. He was methodical and patient, with orderly habits. While still a child, he already had the bearing of an adult, never getting angry or irritable. He didn't cry, even when he got hurt. He never complained as children do, even for a toothache or headache. His undemanding nature was certainly unusual for a child his age.

At the age of three he was sent to cheder. When he grew up and had become advanced in Torah scholarship, his father sent him to Padua, Italy, which was then a renowned center of Torah and secular learning. Throughout this time, it can safely be said that he wasted not a moment from his studies. He was constantly involved either in Torah study or in general studies. Even after he got married and started spending time on business activities, he never stopped studying Torah and general wisdom.

He had a deep interest in natural sciences and world history. He also had a great command of languages, and was fluent in French, Italian, German, Greek, Latin and other languages. From his grandfather Reb Shmuel, the MAHARAL's grandson, he inherited a talent for expertise in

jewelry and the craft of working with gold.

Rabbi Moshe's business dealings took him to other lands. Wherever he went, he would inevitably visit local libraries to research the rare manuscripts he discovered there. His command of many languages enabled him to make important contacts everywhere. From his father and grandfather he had inherited many volumes of Torah and secular books, and now, his own insatiable thirst for knowledge brought him to acquire many new books, until his library became one of the largest and best of his time.

By the year 5475 (1715), the Catholic clergy's persecution of the Jews had become intolerable. Rabbi Moshe resigned from his position as president of the community, and after consulting with his family, decided to leave Posen. Officially, no one was to know or even suspect his intentions.

For all intents and purposes, Rabbi Moshe was leaving on just another business trip. Yet, in reality, he was gradually transferring his fortune to another land. He would then seek a peaceful destination for the whole family, who would follow him later.

His fortune consisted of gold, jewelry, pearls, gems and valuable antiques, besides large sums in cash and promissory notes from noblemen with whom he had been dealing for years. It took him over half a year until he managed to transfer all his possessions, together with his great library, out of the country.

Only then did he travel to Prague, home to many of his relatives who, like him, descended from the MAHARAL.

From there he traveled to a number of lands. Later his family followed him from Posen to Prague, then on to Poland and finally to Minsk, where they finally settled. Meanwhile, Rabbi Moshe traveled from Prague to Padua, Italy, where he had spent part of his youth studying Torah and secular studies. Although he had business to do in Padua, most of his time there was spent participating in the debates then raging in the city's Yeshivos. Since he had left Padua in his youth, study of the Kabbalah had begun to spread among Italy's Jewish scholars. Rabbi Moshe did not approve of this, for he was strongly opposed to Kabbalah study.

From Padua, Rabbi Moshe visited other Italian cities until he reached Rome. He was particularly drawn to the library of the Vatican because of its wealth of Jewish books and manuscripts. He became acquainted with the head librarian, a very learned man, who was deeply impressed with Rabbi Moshe, and particularly by the fact that such a brilliant scholar was Jewish.

Rabbi Moshe's reputation as a great scholar in both Jewish and secular studies spread among the cardinals who now wanted very much to meet him. After several discussions with him, the cardinals were duly impressed and expressed their wishes to have a public debate with him.

This, however, presented a problem. In the auditorium where the debate was to take place, crosses hung on the walls, and the cardinals themselves wore crosses over their heart. Rabbi Moshe therefore set a pre-

condition to the debate that all crosses are to be removed from the walls, and even from the cardinals themselves, during the debate.

Such a bold demand was seen as an insult to these princes of the Church and indeed, to the church itself. No amount of persuasion or threat could move Rabbi Moshe from his principles. He made it clear that his religion forbids bowing his head before a cross, and under no circumstances would he agree to debate them, as long as crosses appeared in front of him.

In the face of such firm resolve, the cardinals could not but agree to Rabbi Moshe's terms — in spite of the strong insult they had suffered.

CHAPTER 45

THE DEBATE WITH THE VATICAN

Cardinals without crosses—A young Jew among the cardinals —Rabbi Moshe seeks a connection.

The debate between the former head of the Posen Jewish community, the great scholar Rabbi Moshe, and the cardinals of the Vatican, eventually took place in accordance with the conditions he had set — without their wearing crosses and without crosses hanging on the walls.

Representing the Vatican side were thirty cardinals and other prominent Vatican officials, twelve of them well known scholars and scientists. Against them stood one man — Rabbi Moshe.

There was another pre-condition on which he had insisted — that the debate be conducted with fair rules and regulations acceptable to both sides. Reluctantly, the Church leaders had to agree. Since the debate was to cover all aspects of the Jewish faith, Rabbi Moshe insisted on equal time for debating all phases of their faith too. Initially, he had insisted also on conducting the debate in both Latin and Hebrew. But few of the cardinals were familiar with Hebrew, and some didn't understand a word of the language. They therefore rejected Rabbi Moshe's demand. But the very fact that they had to rule out Hebrew from the debate was embarrassing.

The Jew knew both his language and theirs, but they didn't. What a humiliation!

The debate was held in an auditorium in one of the Vatican palaces. It was large enough for all thirty members of the Vatican delegation, in addition to the many guests who came to observe.

For the purposes of the debate, a chairman and secretary of protocol were appointed, besides a panel of judges to give their verdict on the arguments presented.

Right from the start, when the first point was raised about the role that faith plays in human life, a sharp disagreement erupted between Rabbi Moshe and the cardinals. The Catholic side was the first to present its arguments on this subject, speaking at great length.

Then came Rabbi Moshe's turn. Before proceeding, he made a point of demonstrating how unbalanced and unfair the debate was from the very start. Speaking in

fluent Italian, his words made a deep, though not pleasant, impression on the eminent Catholic officials, making them feel embarrassed for treating him so unfairly.

For a start, here is just one person against thirty, argued Rabbi Moshe. Furthermore, although Judaism is at least 1600 years older than their faith, the Church's representatives had not given the Jewish side - Rabbi Moshe himself — the chance to speak first, especially as the very first to introduce monotheism, upon which Christianity claims to be based, was none other than Abraham father of the Jewish people. This was another injustice against him.

He then went on to the matter of language. He reminded the cardinals how they had refused his request to speak Hebrew because they were unfamiliar with the language, while giving no thought to whether he understood their language. Even if he did know their language, he was still entitled to speak in Hebrew, if he insisted, just as they were insisting on using their language. If necessary, his words could be translated for them by an interpreter.

A debate not conducted on equally balanced terms, he argued forcefully, would be meaningless.

Rabbi Moshe's words upset the Catholic leaders.

Some flew into a temper, demanding that he be punished for his outrageous audacity. The more serious ones, however, reluctantly admitted that he was right.

As a result, the session was postponed indefinitely

until the format and rules for the debate would be clearly defined and agreed upon.

There was now great resentment in the Vatican against Rabbi Moshe. Even if some cardinals and eminent Church dignitaries recognized the truth of his arguments and even sympathized with him, they naturally dared not express their feelings openly.

One sympathizer and secret admirer of Rabbi Moshe was the cardinal who headed the Vatican library, who had become acquainted with Rabbi Moshe from his frequent visits there. His high praise of Rabbi Moshe to the other cardinals had given them the idea to hold a debate with him.

Supposedly, the debate was intended as a contest of spiritual power and knowledge. Their true intention. however, was to disparage the Jewish faith and discredit Rabbi Moshe.

This cardinal librarian was at heart an admirer of the Jewish faith, which is why he had been so friendly towards Rabbi Moshe. The unfortunate turn of events had shaken him badly, for he had unwittingly drawn Rabbi Moshe into a distressing web of potential danger from which he would find it hard to extricate himself.

Rabbi Moshe was still visiting the library in search of old do rah manuscripts. In order to compensate for what he had unwittingly done to Rabbi Moshe, the cardinal used the opportunity not only to get into discussion with him but also to speak kindly to him.

Meanwhile, something occurred that greatly shocked

Rabbi Moshe. During the preliminary hearings of the debate, which he managed to reschedule, he noticed a face among the audience — an obviously Jewish face. It belonged to a young man sitting among the eminent Vatican officials who had come to witness the debate. Rabbi Moshe didn't have enough time to study the young man, but one look at his face told him his words had made an impact.

He would have liked to know how a young Jew comes to be in the Vatican in the first place. What was he doing there, and why was he sitting among the high' ranking Vatican clergy?

Right alter the session, the young man had disappeared. All Rabbi Moshe's inquiries about him, however, were met by ambiguous replies. He decided to ask the cardinal librarian, who had been showing him friendliness and consideration. It was a secret, the librarian told him, and forbidden to be discussed. But that made him even more curious to get to the bottom of it.

It took a few days before the cardinal finally agreed to tell Rabbi Moshe what he knew of the young Jew. He was a brilliant young scholar, originally from Poland, who had come to Venice, Italy, to study astronomy and attend lectures on religion. It seems that he wanted to learn about the history and development of the world's various religions, besides his own Jewish religion, with which he was familiar from Jewish sources.

The professor of religion at the university of Venice, excited with his brilliant Jewish student, had advised him

that if he really wanted to learn all about religion, he should travel to Rome and study at the Vatican. There, he assured him, he would get all the learning his heart desired. His intention, of course, was that the unsuspecting young Jew become ensnared in the claws of the Catholic priests of the Vatican.

The young man had accepted his professor's advice — probably not realizing the danger involved. Six months had passed since the young Jew had arrived at the Vatican. At first he was meticulous in his observance of his religion, but he gradually faltered. His ties to Judaism were not yet severed, as he still kept Shabbos and Kashrus. But he was already under the influence of his Catholic teachers, who were full of hope that it was but a matter of time before he would convert to their religion

As long as the young Jew was not yet converting and was still at the crossroads, the high Catholic dignitaries wanted the matter kept secret. They were eager to catch this Jewish soul, especially such a brilliant and learned one.They were afraid to let him come under any influence that might divert him from getting converted.

Rabbi Moshe was deeply moved by this. He immediately felt it his sacred duty to save the young Polish Jew from leaving Judaism, G d forbid.

To think that he had ever regretted visiting the Vatican library. This was how the cardinal librarian had gotten to know him and had excitedly told his colleagues about his wisdom. As a result, they had pressed upon him the idea of a public debate, getting him into this trouble.

Yet now he clearly saw the hand of G-d, which had guided hint here for a higher purpose. If not for his visits to the library and the resultant debate, he would never have noticed the young Jew who so needed his help. He was grateful to the Almighty for the opportunity to perform such a great mitzvah.

But how was he to go about saving the young man?

He hadn’t even met him yet and had no idea how to get to hint Besides, it would be no easy task to win over someone standing on the very edge of the “forty-nine gateways of spiritual contamination." Much depended now on what the cardinals would decide about the debate.

A few days later, Rabbi Moshe was informed of the Vatican's decision to postpone the debate for two weeks. The cardinals now understood that, to be fair, the debate could not take place between thirty cardinals on one side against the lone Rabbi Moshe, as originally planned. Instead, one scholarly cardinal would represent the church and debate Rabbi Moshe, one against one. The two contestants together would choose a third person to serve as mediator.

Since there was still time before the debate, Rabbi Moshe asked the cardinal librarian to introduce him to the young Jew who was on the verge of conversion, Gd forbid.

CHAPTER I

ON THE THRESHOLD OF CONVERSION

Rabbi Moshe gets to know the young Jewish student going

astray — Rabbi Moshe's influence.

At first the cardinal in charge of the Vatican library refused Rabbi Moshe's request. He was afraid to be the one to snatch victory from the hands of the church by helping Rabbi Moshe save the young student from their carefully laid trap. The Vatican had its spies forever on the alert against everyone, no matter how high his position, and especially as this most valuable prize needed to be guarded well.

But the cardinal did give Rabbi Moshe important information about the young man's daily routine. Once every day he went to pray at the Beth Hamidrash. He also ate his meals every day at a certain kosher restaurant, which also served as a Jewish guesthouse. Clearly, he had not broken his connection to his Jewish faith. Rabbi Moshe could arrange to meet the young man at either of these two places and have it look as if the meeting was by chance rather than planned.

Alter some thought, Rabbi Moshe decided on paying a visit to the aforementioned guesthouse where the young Polish Jew ate his daily and Shabbos meals. The innkeeper told Rabbi Moshe about all the guests — including that young man, whom he identified as a native of Vilna.

Rabbi Moshe waited for Shabbos, confident that he would see the young man then. And so, he came to the inn that Shabbos, washed his hands and sat down to eat. As soon as the young man noticed Rabbi Moshe, whom he recognized from the debate at the Vatican, he came over to his table and declared with obvious sincerity:

“I heard yourdebate with the cardinals and your words have left a deep impression on me. 1 now have grave doubts about Christianity. When I discussed this with my professor and suggested to him that I meet with you to discuss these doubts, he told me you had already left Rome.”

Seeing that the young man was clearly sincere and innocent, Rabbi Moshe suggested that he not tell his Catholic mentor about their meeting. He arranged to continue meeting with him in secret to discuss issues of faith, a subject that interested the young man truly.

At their first meeting, the young man introduced himself as Gedalia Moshe Gordon from Vilna. The story he unfolded before Rabbi Moshe revealed a remarkable account of the deep desire for Torah and general learning among Jews of the time.

Gedalia Moshe’s father was a Torah scholar and doctor in Vilna. He had studied medicine in Padua, Italy, under a scholarship from a well known Vilna philanthropist. In due course he became renowned in Vilna, giving his services free of charge to poor folk. In addition, he devoted every spare moment to the study of Torah.

As a native of Vilna, this scholarly doctor was originally and not surprisingly, an opponent of Kabbalah study.

But when he went to study medicine in Padua, he also studied Torah under the city’s great Torah scholars, who were supporters of Kabbalah. Through them he became

interested in this secret study.

On returning to Vilna, he continued studying Kabbalah, introducing it also to his sons. But Gedalia Moshe, having been exposed to the medical knowledge of his talented father, was drawn more to secular studies and particularly to the study of languages.

Only after permeating himself with Torah knowledge, did Gedalia Moshe set out for Italy to further his secular studies. It was in Venice that his interest in religion was sparked, and from where, upon the advice of his prolessors, he set out for Rome to study at the Vatican.

In Rome, under the influence of his professors at the Vatican, Gedalia Moshe gradually started leaning toward Catholicism. The leading Vatican officials started to see him as a leather in their cap as their carefully laid trap was beginning to close in on their unsuspecting victim.

But Gedalia Moshe was not yet ready. He still had many inner conflicts to resolve — if indeed they could be resolved.

At the same time, he told Rabbi Moshe much about the Vatican academy of learning. Rabbi Moshe was shocked to learn that quite a number of its students and its professors were actually Jewish! Some high ranking clergy who taught at the Vatican academy were converts from Judaism, while others were barely Jewish, although they had not actually converted.

This was especially the case with a certain Professor Lcmbrenne, Gedalia Moshe's mathematics instructor, a Jew from France who, while very assimilated, was far

from adopting Christianity. The influence of this assimilated Jew and of his Catholic teachers, a number of them fanatical converts from Judaism, had shaken Gedalia Moshe's faith in the Torah and brought him to the brink of Catholicism.

It was in the nick of time that Rabbi Moshe had arrived. Building upon the young man's deep respect for him, Rabbi Moshe, using his clear logic and broad knowledge, succeeded in convincing him that the right answers on all questions of faith can be found in the Torah. Before long, Gedalia Moshe renewed his strong connection to his Jewish faith.

He also followed Rabbi Moshe's advice for avoiding the trap so carefully set for him by the priests of the Catholic Church. Instead of staying at the academy's student dormitory in the Vatican, Gedalia Moshe moved in with a local Jewish family in Rome, going to the academy only for lectures. A change soon took place in Gedalia Moshe's entire outlook on religion.

Endowed with a brilliant mind, Gedalia Moshe easily managed two courses at once, one purely scientific, on mathematics and astronomy, and another, philosophy of religion, on issues of faith.

For the course in science, he had instructors such as the assimilated Jewish Professor Lcmbrenne. The head of that department, although a Catholic, was one who respected Judaism, or at least the Jewish Scriptures, which he had studied in the original. Gedalia Moshe made great progress in this course and it was clear that he

would complete it rapidly with high honors.

His professors of religion however, were all influential priests in the Vatican. As long as they thought they could win him for the Church, they were very friendly towards him, doing him all sorts of favors. But when they realized that Gedalia Moshe — as a result of his discussions with Rabbi Moshe — was standing firm in his Jewish convictions and beginning to counter all their arguments against the Jewish faith with confidence and solid knowledge, they started viewing him with hostility, humiliating and denigrating him.

Gedalia Moshe started to feel out of place at the Papal academy's philosophy of religion department. But his hurt feelings were more than compensated for by his continued discussions with Rabbi Moshe, which consoled him and gave him the strength to become ever more convinced of the eternal truth of the Jewish faith.

During the time that Rabbi Moshe was waiting for his debate to resume with the cardinals, Gedalia Moshe completed his courses. He had had no problems completing his math and science course, which he graduated with the highest honors. However, in his course on religion, he was given a failing mark and not allowed to graduate. He was even ridiculed by his professors for demonstrating the Jewish point of view on subjects of faith. I hey tormented him for his typical Jewish stubbornness and "blindness" to the "light" of the "true" religion — theirs.

As hurt as he was by this treatment, he had no choice

but to swallow it, sufficing himself with the high honors in his science course.

Meanwhile, Gedalia Moshe's relationship with Rabbi Moshe grew deeper. He started introducing him to other Jewish students at the Papal academy. They came from many lands. Not all were estranged from their Jewish faith, nor were all under the influence of the Catholic priests, who always sought an opportunity to attract Jewish students to Catholicism.

Young Jewish students, many of them considerable Torah scholars, were attracted to the Vatican academy for the simple reason that it was one of very few universities and academies of higher learning at that time to accept Jews. Hoping to win converts to the Church, the Vatican eagerly accepted Jewish students, even on full scholarships. As a result, dozens of Jewish students were then studying at the Vatican academy.

Gedalia Moshe's exceptional talents attracted great attention, and he became the pride of all the Jewish students. By returning to Torah Judaism, thanks to Rabbi Moshe's efforts, Gedalia Moshe became a role model for his Jewish fellow students, influencing them to become more involved in Jewish activities and closer to true Judaism.

It came to a point where the Jewish students began holding meetings at which they openly discussed ways of helping their straying and alienated brethren return to Judaism. Gedalia Moshe was highly regarded by his fellow students because of his high academic honors and he used

his ever growing influence to help them become better. Rabbi Moshe followed this wondrous turn of events with keen attention and excitement, grateful for the part he had played in it. He understood now why he had to stay in Rome for so long.

CHAPTER 47

THE JEWISH VICTORY

The debate is renewed — Rabbi Moshe's conditions — Jewish students return to the fold.

One day there came the long awaited notification from the Vatican of the newly scheduled date for the debate, which had come to such an abrupt halt. Now it was to be conducted under completely new conditions. Instead of Rabbi Moshe pitted against some thirty cardinals, he would be facing only three.

Again, Rabbi Moshe had the courage to point out the inequities of the Catholic leaders against him. Firstly, he had insisted from the very start that under no circumstances would he debate in a place of graven images or crosses. Therefore he could not agree to holding the debate, as they had wanted, in the hall of the Papal palace known as the “Hall of the Icons.” He even insisted that the cardinals were to remove the crosses from their garments during the debate.

They had conceded all this to him. So why, he now asked, had it suddenly been decided to hold the debate in the Hall of the Icons?

His audacity annoyed the cardinals so much that some of them demanded harsh punishment for the Jew to teach him more respect for the Church and its leaders.
they were even ready to cancel the debate and give him the punishment they felt he deserved.
But after careful and lengthy consideration, the cardinals decided to accept Rabbi Moshe's conditions and have the debate in one of the rooms of the Vatican library.
But the matter was not yet settled. The cardinals wanted the debate to start on Friday. Rabbi Moshe accepted, but told them he could stay only until a certain houtof the afternoon — so that he would have time to get ready for Shabbos.
The debate started on Friday before noon. The senior cardinal opened the debate with a speech in which he explained the need for such a debate — to show everyone how blind the Jews are for retaining their ancient faith instead of accepting Christianity.
Again Rabbi Moshe objected, this time to why the Catholic side should have the first word. The fair thing to do would be to draw lots. There were also other demands he had about the debate's format.
The cardinals considered these demands as yet another affront on the part of the Jew. Some would have been happy to cancel the debate altogether and declare the Jew defeated. A few even demanded that he be severely punished as well. But the more moderate among them considered Rabbi Moshe's demands justified. It took a heated discussion between the cardinals until it was

finally decided to continue the debate and give Rabbi Moshe the floor.

Rabbi Moshe spoke for three hours and with clear and powerful logic he established the truth of the Jewish faith: “Moshe is true and his Torah is true.”

By contrast he demonstrated the falsehood of the Christian faith, which is based not on belief in One G d but in a “trinity” — whatever that means. Although they found Rabbi Moshe's words very hard to swallow, the Catholic leaders had to admit to his outstanding delivery, his brilliant eloquence and his broad scholarship.

His speech had a particularly powerful effect on the Jewish students and professors at the Vatican academy, most of whom had come under the strong influence of the Church, or otherwise alienated from Judaism. To his great satisfaction, Rabbi Moshe learned that just as he had previously succeeded in helping Gedalia Moshe, so were his words now helping to bring many other young Jews back to their roots.

He had been upset at having to participate in the debate and at some of its conditions that he felt forced to accept. Yet, with a mounting sense of foreboding, he feared that precisely because of his great success at the debate there might now come severe retaliation from the Vatican. But he was heartened by the far-reaching impact he had on the Jewish students and professors, helping to reestablish their ties with their faith and people.

Gedalia Moshe of Vilna, the student who had once been on the brink of conversion, by now had become a

staunch Baal Teshuva. His wide Torah and secular knowledge made him a natural leader and he became the vital force within this group of "returnees".

A remarkable phenomenon was now taking place. These young Jews, who were mostly from assimilated homes in other lands, suddenly — from within the Vatican of all places — were writing home in a completely new, genuinely Jewish spirit.

Their parents were amazed at how their sons studying at the Vatican academy had suddenly absorbed Judaism. Some of them were pleased, while others resented it, for they were so removed from their faith that they felt more non Jewish than Jewish.

One such family, from Sweden, would have gladly embraced Christianity but had not had the courage to do so. They had sent their son to the Vatican academy in the secret hope that he would eventually convert and open for them the way to the non Jewish world.

Now, suddenly, they were getting letters from him about his newly discovered Jewish faith. He wrote straight out that he had become observant of the Mitzvos and felt fortunate to get to know his Judaism and its true spiritual nature.

For his parents, this was a tragedy. Their son, whose conversion they had hoped would be their key to Christianity, was now , ironically, talking like a devoutly frum Jew!

The father promptly sent him a long letter, reproaching him for his "craziness." Whatever had gotten

into him? Didn't he realize that his devotion to Judaism would evoke hatred among non Jews? His hope had always been to see him converted, and now — such an unexpected turn, lie concluded his letter by accusing him of bringing calamity upon himself and his parents.

His son did not take long to reply. Gently but very firmly, his letter explained that although the Torah commands us to respect outparents, whatever their material or religious level — and he is always prepared to do that — it did not mean that he would allow them to influence his faith. It was indeed in the Vatican of all places, he continued, that Gd had brought him into the company of other Jews who had opened his eyes to distinguish between truth and falsehood.

The son concluded his letter with a suggestion to his father to sell his business and real estate in Sweden and move to Amsterdam, Holland, which at the time had a large religious Jewish community. On completing his medical studies, he wrote, he would join his parents in Amsterdam and set up his practice there. But under no circumstances would he return to Sweden, because he did not like the company of the estranged Jews of his parents' social circle, nor of the local non Jews who regarded the Jews with hostility.

His parents were far from convinced. But his mind was already made up. As soon as he completed his studies, he settled in Amsterdam and married the daughter of a respected and well to-do scholar. He soon earned the reputation of a great physician and Gdfearing man. It

was not long before his parents joined him in Amsterdam and became observant Jews.

A similar story happened with the student Anthony Yasinowsky. His parents, who lived in Warsaw, had become so estranged from Judaism that they hadn't even circumcised their son. For whatever reason, they had not had the courage to convert, but they hoped that their son would do it, giving them an excuse to do the same.

Anthony was studying science at the Vatican. He was supposed to decide whether he would stay in Italy and have his parents join him there to share his newfound faith, or return to Poland so that they could follow him into the Christian world.

Now, however, Anthony became one of the students at the Vatican academy who returned to Judaism. He had himself circumcised and started learning about his religion. But he did not write to his parents about it, mentioning only insignificant details.

Only after completing his studies did he suddenly inform his parents of his circumcision and new name — Avraham. He told them he planned to return not to Warsaw hut to Cracow, Poland, because it was a great center of Torah and G d fearing Jews.

His parents were thunderstruck. But there was nothing they could do. Avraham Yasinowsky settled in Cracow as a proud Jew, accepting a position as professor of science at Prince Radziwill's academy and marrying a Jewish girl of fine ancestry.

There were similar stories with other Jewish students

of the Vatican academy — all thanks to Rabbi Moshe's proud defense of Judaism and his efforts to influence them.

Rabbi Moshe felt his mission in Rome had been accomplished. Now he turned his attention to business, planning to buy rare objects of art and whole collections in Rome, and export them to London.

Meanwhile, however, he discovered that his victory over 1 he cardinals at the debate had reached the attention of the Pope himself. As a result, the Pope had decreed that a special tract be published to demonstrate the superiority of Christianity over Judaism.

Rabbi Moshe felt it urgent to counteract such a tract with one written by Jews to persuade both Jews and non Jews of the eternal truth of the Jewish faith.

And so instead of leaving for London, Rabbi Moshe traveled to Mantua, Italy, which then had a prominent Jewish community. Together with the Torah leaders of that city, he prepared this tract, which he felt would refute all Christian arguments against Judaism.

During this time, Gedalia Moshe completed his studies and wrote a dissertation on religion — replete with proofs of the truth of Judaism. After receiving his diploma as professor, it seemed he would probably stay in Rome, for he had been offered a number of positions there.

CHAPTER 48

THE NAZIRITE IN ROME

Rabbi Moshe's wanderings and plans — The Hermit comes to see

the Pope —The distinguished guest disappears.

Although Rabbi Moshe was now in Mantua, Italy, he kept in touch with Gedalia Moshe, who was now known as Professor Gordon. Both held that a frontal offensive — using both the spoken and written word — against the attacks of the Christian world, would reinforce belief in the Jewish faith among Jews.

From Mantua, Rabbi Moshe traveled to London, which had at the time two Jewish communities. The Ashkenazi (German Jewish) community was headed by Rabbi Uri Mannheimcr and the Sefardi (Spanish Portuguese) community, by Het Chacham David Nieto. Both Rabbis were notable scholars and G d fearing men.

Although Rabbi Moshe's trip was for business, his time was spent mainly on communal affairs, particularly on publishing pamphlets to refute Christian arguments against the Jewish faith. He was convinced that this was an urgent necessity.

Gedalia Moshe's letters from Rome kept him informed of what was happening with the Jewish students at the Vatican academy. Most had been distant from Judaism and some had come dangerously close to conversion. Now, however, most of them had become strongly devoted to Judaism. Like Gedalia Moshe himself and largely under his influence, they had become deeply involved in Jewish studies, and were already convinced that their path in life lay within the Jewish people, not by

becoming close to Christianity.

Rabbi Moshe Felt that he too had played a role in this development. It had been his visit to Rome and his unwilling involvement in the debate at the Vatican that had eventually opened the minds and hearts of Gedalia Moshe and his fellow students to the light of Torah.

As the former head of the Jewish community in Posen, who had been forced out of his city by the harsh decrees of the Catholic church, Rabbi Moshe now felt the need more than ever and once and for all to repel the attacks and attackers by printing as many books and pamphlets as necessary in defense and support of the Jewish faith.

London, with its large Jewish community and ample printing facilities, was ideal for Rabbi Moshe's needs. He even arranged for the publication of a pamphlet on these subjects in English — not only to strengthen the faith of Jews who had become estranged from their people but also for the main purpose of making an impression on England's non Jews.

Rabbi Moshe was well aware that such an effort could likely stir the anger of the non Jews in England and Christians in general. But he was convinced that the only weapon Jews had was the truth — and the truth was clearly on the side of the Jews.

While staying in London and involved in the preparation of these pamphlets for publication. Rabbi Moshe received additional courage from the letters which Gedalia Moshe wrote to him from Rome.

One particular story which Gedalia Moshe reported, left Rabbi Moshe very excited. It may sound like a fantasy, but it actually happened.

One day, quite unexpectedly, a distinguished guest appeared in Rome, lie was the venerable, elderly Christian scholar and philosopher, Professor Christian di Lezziate, whose name had once, many years before, been renowned throughout the Christian world. For a long time, however, he had not been seen in Rome nor heard from.

In his youth he had been a disciple of Archbishop Gregory di Piranta of Venice. Later, he had played an important role in the Catholic Church as one of its foremost priests.

Now di Lezziate let it be known that he had come to Rome for the express purpose of meeting with the Pope. So highly was he held in the Vatican that as soon as they learned of his arrival in Rome, a delegation of prominent Vatican personalities was sent to welcome him. It was decided to invite their important guest to stay at the Vatican in a special apartment in the Pope's palace, where he would also have his own private chapel for prayer Within a few days, an official reception would be held in his honor, led by the Pope, cardinals and other distinguished Vatican personalities.

Professor di Lezziate thanked the Papal delegation lor the honor they sought to give him, but explained that he had to decline. For the past thirty-five years, he explained, he had been leading the life of a Nazirite,

fasting and conducting himself altogether differently from most people.

His only wish was to meet face to face with the Pope. Long ago, he had decided that this is what he wanted to do before he died — to meet privately with the Pope to pouthis heart out and reveal to him his inner secrets.

The elderly Professor's reply and strange request took the Papal delegation by complete surprise. How could anyone refuse such an honor? They had no choice but to relay di Lezziate's words to the cardinals.

It was clear that he was indeed a hermit. Born in Verona, Italy, and orphaned of both parents at a tender age, he had been adopted and raised by his uncle, who was a priest. His unusual talents were obvious from the start and he made great strides in his studies. By the age of twenty, he had already earned the title of doctor of philosophy. His uncle then sent him to Archbishop di Piranta in Venice to further his studies.

Besides his extensive knowledge, the young di Lczziate — by now a full-fledged priest — had great oratorical talent and was appointed to head those priests who had the task of conducting debates with Jews and other "infidels" to prove to them the truth of Christianity.

For several years, di Lezziate's fiery sermons and extensive written works in defense of Christianity made him famous, to the extent that he was highly regarded in the Vatican itself.

A bright future awaited him in the Church.

Archbishop di Piranta wrote to the Pope praising him

highly, noting particularly the young philosopher's "successful" debates with well known Jewish scholars. Suddenly, however, di Lezziatc had disappeared without a trace. No one had the slightest idea where he was, but rumor had it that the young priest had become an anchorite, leading a life of isolation in self-imposed exile in some distant land. There was even a report that he had gone to India, from where he had never returned.

Now, in his old age, di Lezziatc suddenly reappeared in Rome. He had wished to have a private audience with the Pope — but without any of the ceremonial trimmings. Actually, in his younger years, di Lezziatc had had two audiences with the Pope, an honor accorded him on Archbishop di Piranta's recommendation for his expert conduct of the debates with the Jews.

Now, however, he was acting in a different manner and making requests of another sort. The cardinals assumed this unusual behavior to be in keeping with his hermit lifestyle. His appearance alone evoked awed reverence. He was tall in stature and, despite his self' imposed fasts and other ascetic restrictions, his face was lull with a healthy complexion. His black garments and wooden sandals, as well as his long silver hair falling to below his shoulders and his long white beard, gave him the appearance of a holy man.

Prom under his bushy eyebrows shined two fiery, piercing dark eyes. Whoever dared meet his penetrating gaze left utterly humbled, sensing an encounter with one's essential self.

After some deliberation, the cardinals conveyed the hermit s message to the Pope. Careful consideration was given to the matter and it was decided to hold the initial ceremonial reception for di Lezziatc as originally planned — with all formal trimmings, as was customary in the Vatican.

Then di Lezziate would have his wish fulfilled - an absolutely private audience with the Pope.

No one doubted that these arrangements would please the venerable hermit. Even if the personal honor accorded him at the reception may not meet with his approval, he would surely understand that it was not so much for his own pleasure that this was being done but to show everyone how highly regarded are those who devote their life to the Christian faith. Especially so in the case of di Lezziate — who had rendered such great services for the Church in his early years.

They sent word of their plans to di Lezziate, who was still staying at the inn in Rome where he had originally arrived. The dates were set for his official reception and his audience with the Pope.

On the day appointed for the formal reception, the Pope’s personal carriage, drawn by eight horses, was sent at his own command to di Lezziate’s inn to bring the honored guest. Following the Papal carriage were another five carriages of Papal officials, charged with accompanying him to the Vatican.

Alongside the carriages were mounted guards, attired in their Vatican uniform. The elaborate procession

attracted a large crowd of onlookers on its way. The most religious among them, seeing the Pope's own carriage, fell to their knees and crossed themselves.

The procession reached the inn. But there, a shock awaited them. Their esteemed guest had left! Early that morning, he had settled his account with the innkeeper, thrown his bundle over his shoulder and walked off. The innkeeper had no idea why he had left or where he had gone.

The papal delegation was now at a complete loss as to what to do next.

Their timing was to be so exact that, as soon as they would return to the Vatican with their guest, the official reception in his honor was supposed to begin. The cardinals and other prominent personalities and honored guests were all supposed to be awaiting his appearance at the appointed time. What was the delegation to do now come back without the guest for whom everyone was wailing?

ı hey decided to stay at the inn while their messenger returned to the Vatican with the news of what had happened, letting them know that they awaited further instructions.

CHAPTER 49

THE RIGHTEOUS CONVERT

The misunderstanding—The Hermit in private audience with the Pope —The righteous convert.

Shocked by the news of di Lezziate's disappearance and realizing the dilemma in which the Papal delegation found itself, the cardinals sent instructions to check other inns in the area. It might well be that the venerable philosopher had changed his residence.

But all the same, the plans for the reception at the Vatican would proceed as scheduled, for it could not be cancelled at this point. By now all the prominent guests had assembled in the Pope’s palace for the ceremony — only the guest of honor still needed to make his appearance.

As soon as the messenger brought word from the cardinals, the delegation set out on its search for the hermit. The Papal carriage with its impressive entourage of mounted riders and foot soldiers attracted large crowds as it made its rounds of the local inns. The streets were black with people.

However, di Lezziate was nowhere to be found...

What had happened? The elderly di Lezziate had decided not to wait to be picked up, but to go to the Vatican on his own by foot. Despite his imposing figure garbed in black, with his long white hair and beard, no one paid him particular attention.

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At the Vatican, he decided to forego formal registration with the secretaries in charge of admittance for an audience with the Pope, going instead directly to the Pope's personal attendants. In his unassuming manner, he

told an attendant that he was supposed to be admitted for an audience with the Pope and asked to be shown the way. The attendant, having no idea of the ceremonial reception being held elsewhere in the palace for an important guest — who happened to be the very one standing before him — innocently led di Lczziate into a waiting room and told him to wait there. Then he went to report to one of the Papal officials about this person waiting to be received by the Pope.

The official, made no connection between the stranger and the esteemed di Lezziate for whom everyone was waiting in the great hall of the Papal palace. He lost his temper with the attendant for his stupidity in asking the stranger, whoever he was, to wait — as if he was indeed entitled to be received by the Pope — instead of showing him the door. For such audacity and stupidity, the official gave the unfortunate attendant a resounding slap, ordering him to get rid of the stranger immediately.

Stung by the unexpected slap, the attendant in turn let out his annoyance on the waiting stranger. With harsh words, he shouted at him to leave the palace immediately.

Pi Lczziate, in his innocence, could not understand why the attendant had suddenly become so upset with him. Theold man was left confused and hesitant as he submissively obeyed.

After such punishing treatment, the elderly scholar realized that his only choice was to go to the office that made formal appointments for audiences with the Pope.

Meanwhile, the procession that was to have

accompanied di Lezziate to the Vatican returned empty-handed. The master of ceremonies in charge of the elaborate reception had no choice but to inform everyone that the ceremonial meeting with the Pope would not be taking place.

The guests dispersed. The talk among the Vatican officials was that the hermit no doubt must have felt inadequate to meet his Excellency and had decided to resume his solitude so as to prepare himself spiritually for the occasion. He would surely return shortly, they reasoned.

A little while later, a high Vatican official who knew di Lezziate, happened to pass through the appointment office. He was shocked to notice di Lezziate humbly sitting on a bench awaiting his turn to submit his request! With deep respect, he approached the revered celebrity to ask him what had happened. Di Lezziate calmly told him how he had had come for the audience and informed the Pope's attendants of his arrival. But his harsh rebuff had persuaded him that he was better off making a formal application. Now he was just sitting here awaiting his turn.

This disrespectful treatment of such a renowned personality created a great stir. Something had to be done to correct this terrible misunderstanding.

The story reached the Pope himself and soon the cardinals gathered again to honor their elusive guest — this time with even greater ceremony. But di Lezziate repeated his request for a private audience with the Pope,

for he had urgent and confidential matters to discuss with him. After the audience, he would be leaving Rome.

His request was conveyed to the Pope, who granted his wish for privacy. Other than the Pope himself and di Lezziate, no one else was present and no one knew what transpired or what was discussed at that historic meeting.

After no more than twenty minutes, di Lezziate emerged from the Pope's private chamber. The cardinals eagerly awaited him, but he did not linger even a moment. To their amazement, he immediately left the Papal palace without a trace.

The cardinals exchanged looks of bewilderment.

When one of them entered the Papal chamber, he was shocked to find the Pope in deep melancholy, his eyes full of tears and betraying deep distress.

Not a word passed the Pope’s lips, nor did the cardinal dare ask what had happened and why he was so sad and downcast.

On taking leave of the Pope, the cardinal reported back to his colleagues. They all tried desperately to guess what had happened between di Lezziate and the Pope. No doubt he had disclosed some terrible news.

It did not take long for various rumors to start circulating in the Vatican, all of them shrouded in deep secrecy, about di Lezziate’s audience with the Pope.

1 he cardinals walked about depressed, for the Pope now closeted himself in his chamber for several weeks, permitting entry to no one, not even those closest to him.

After finally emerging from his seclusion, the Pope

held a closed meeting with his cardinals. At first, this meeting remained as mysterious as di Lezziate's audience with the Pope.

Eventually, however, the secret of the celebrated hermit's mysterious audience became known. It was indeed an amazing story.

Apparently, when di Lezziate had entered the chamber, the Pope stretched out his cross for him to kiss, as was customary, to initiate their meeting. But di Lezziate had refused. He refused even to kneel before him and kiss the hem of his Papal robes.

The Pope was shocked. Could this mean that di Lezziate had ceased to be a Christian?

Yes! That was precisely the case. The very man who had gained prominence some thirty five years earlier as a staunch defender of the church in his debates with the Jews, came to renounce this church. He had come to the realization back then, that the truth actually lay with the Jews. After conducting so many debates in an effort to prove the Jewish faith false, di Lezziate had became convinced that Judaism was the true faith.

He could no longer remain in Venice. Despite his fame there, which had reached as far the Vatican and which brought him great honor there, too, he had to leave. He also could not disclose his conclusions to any of his Christian friends or colleagues.

So when he had suddenly disappeared from Italy many years before, no one had any idea where he had gone. Rumors spread that he had become a hermit,

traveling to India to live in seclusion. The truth, of course, was now clear — he had become a Jew.

He traveled to Amsterdam, Holland, which was then a great Jewish center with many Torah scholars and had convened to Judaism, taking the name Avraham, as is customary with many righteous converts.

In Amsterdam he spent his time in Torah study, first under a Rabbi and later on his own. He did not leave the city until he reached the age of seventy. Not knowing how much longer he would live, he decided then to make the trip to Rome to meet the Pope. He had but one aim in mind — to declare that he had long ago become a Jew, and that, like a number of other Christians, he had come to the conclusion that the Jewish faith is the only true one. This he had hoped would help to stop the persecutions against the Jews and the spilling of Jewish blood. He had very much hoped to meet with the Pope and suggest to him in strict confidence that he examine the question and come to his own conclusions regarding the Jewish faith.

That is exactly what he did. During his twenty minute audience with the Pope, he gave the head of the Catholic Church some earnest admonition, which left the catholic leader dumbstruck.

The Pope was so overwhelmed that, after di Lezziate walked out, he had just sat there, utterly deflated. Tears flowed down his cheeks long after the righteous convert left.

At first he had been unwilling to disclose any details

of this painful encounter. Rut once he finally did, it became a top priority for everyone at the Vatican to keep the story from leaking out to the world. It was apparent that belief in Catholicism was declining among some of its followers. The Vatican therefore decided to intensify its campaign to uphold the faith and, at the same time, to uproot from its midst any weakening of faith.

Despite the Vatican's desperate efforts to suppress the story of Christian di Lezziate's conversion to Judaism, it soon spread among the Jews, who were much encouraged and gladdened by it

CHAPTER 50

REB MOSHE IS OSTRACIZED

Persecution in Posen—From Prague to Poland

Rabbi Moshe in Minsk — Opponent of Kabbalah

Rabbi Moshe was fascinated by the amazing story about the righteous convert that Gedalia Moshe had written to him from Rome. It only added to his already strong resolve to promote his publications campaign. His many pamphlets, written in various languages and circulated widely, were intended to help Jews strengthen their faith and to convince non Jews of the truth of the Jewish religion.

At the head of the society running this campaign was to be the young scholar, Gedalia Moshe Gordon. Although he had been offered a professorship at the Sorbonne University in Paris, Gedalia Moshe was ready to give up

this prestigious position for the sake of his religion and his people.

Rabbi Moshe, well aware that it was his influence which had turned Gedalia Moshe's life around when he had been on the verge of forsaking his faith, felt it his duty to guide him in the present situation as well. He therefore stayed in London a while longer to help the young scholar in this ambitious campaign.

His efforts were well rewarded as the importance of this campaign began to be appreciated by Jewish leaders from many lands.

Rabbi Moshe and Professor Gordon, who had meanwhile settled in London, were pleasantly surprised to receive a letter from none other than the righteous convert himself — Avraham, previously known as Christian di Lezziate. Despite his advanced age and failing health, he wrote, he was spreading Jewish faith wherever he could. He always openly told everyone of his background as a Catholic priest who had been highly regarded even in the Vatican, where the Pope had honored him for his prowess in debates with the Jews. Now, however, he told everyone that he had come to realize the truth of the Jewish faith, and dared even to come and tell that to the Pope himself!

Rabbi Moshe would have likely remained in London with Professor Gordon to promote his society's activities, were it not for the disturbing letters that he began receiving from his family in Posen. They reported that persecutions of the Jews by the Catholics were

intensifying and many Jews were fleeing Posen, fearing the approach of even worse times.

Sure enough, their worst fears were confirmed with the unleashing of a fierce pogrom, causing Posen's Jews to run for their lives wherever they could find refuge.

Rabbi Moshe's family managed to escape to Prague where he had already made preparations for such an eventuality. He rejoined them there and worked at making a permanent home for them in Prague. He resumed his business activities, bringing his sons and sons'in'law into thebusiness. Only his youngest son, the brilliant scholar Rabbi Schneur Zalman, had no desire to go into business, opting instead for teaching.

However, Rabbi Moshe soon realized that Prague could not become his family's permanent home — and so he set out lor Poland in search of a more suitable place.

Minsk, as it turned out, became the city of his choice, where he would soon relocate with his family.

h seemed at first that Rabbi Moshe would choose Cracow, so taken was he with this remarkable, well organized center of Torah. Its Jews were organized into guilds according to their trades or crafts. There were separate guilds for merchants dealing in fur, wool, timber, grain and so on, and the craftsmen were organized according to their crafts as well. Each guild had its president and officers, whose task was to make sure that the guild's members studied Torah regularly and observed Mitzvos properly.

Another custom of Cracow's Jews that greatly

impressed Rabbi Moshe was that everyone, as a matter of course, selected a Torah scholar for a son in law. Rich or poor, each Jew considered it an honor to support his son-in law lor a minimum of three years while the young man devoted himself to Torah study. That was how Cracow became known as a city of Torah scholarship where learning Torah was part of everyone's daily experience.

Although Rabbi Moshe was greatly inspired by all this, he rejected Cracow for one reason. It was a center of Kabbalah study. As an opponent of Kabbalah, he decided not to settle there and selected instead thecity of Minsk, which was also a center of Torah study, but not of Kabbalah. His children and sons-in-law all joined him in Minsk — with one exception. His son Schncur Zalman had decided to settle in Vitebsk, where his students' families had settled.

In Minsk. Rabbi Moshe no longer pursued communal activities, concentrating instead on study of Torah and other studies that interested him such as languages.

Even in such a city of great Torah scholars. Rabbi Moshe stood out as a rarity, a great scholar proficient in both Torah and secular scholarship. The great scholars of Minsk admired and respected Rabbi Moshe not only for his prestigious descent from the MAHARAL but also for his wisdom. However, he had hardly anyone in Minsk with whom he could discuss secular wisdom. Rabbi Moshe felt somewhat out of place.

This was one reason why Rabbi Moshe still continued his travels to Italy, France and England. The

trips were for business purposes, but also in order to meet other Jewish intellectuals with whom he could discuss common interests and in order to acquire books of worldly scholarship.

By now. Professor Gordon had settled in Paris, where he became well known. On his trips, Rabbi Moshe often met with him. They also kept in touch by frequent correspondence, which reinforced their strong ties of friendship.

Rabbi Moshe was an admirer of beauty, explaining that it was actually in accordance with Torah values. He had such an admiration for beauty that he considered even beautiful handwriting to be of great importance Not only should the content of writing be beautiful, he would say, but also its penmanship. His admiration for fine handwriting was actually closely connected with his business, which dealt in articles of beauty, antiques and objects of art. He also had a natural talent for artistic craftsmanship.

Rabbi Moshe's home in Minsk became a center for Torah scholars, as well as a natural focal point to the poor and needy who sought his philanthropic generosity. He welcomed everyone kindly and graciously.

Rabbi Moshe's wife was his true partner in the many deeds of his charity. She was especially involved in supporting poor yeshiva students, hosting as many as fifteen to twenty of them at her table every day and even more on Shabbos and Yom Tov. The couple employed several people for the sole purpose of helping them in

their hospitality and charitable work.

Rabbi Moshe could have lived out his years peacefully and contentedly in Minsk, since, as mentioned, whatever he did not have in Minsk, he was able to make up for on his trips abroad.

When he reached the age of seventy five, he stopped his travels abroad, staying home to devote himself full' time to his studies.

Unfortunately, it was destined for him at that time to start getting the cold shoulder from the secret Chassidim in Minsk, who were followers of the Baal Shem Tov. They had begun to regard Rabbi Moshe with suspicion and to shun him.

Minsk was actually a city of Misnagdim — opponents of Kabbalah and Chassidus. Rabbi Moshe naturally had a good rapport with them, especially as his piety, scholarship and generosity endeared him to everyone.

At first, he enjoyed the friendship of all Jews in Minsk including the secret Chassidim, who were led by Rabbi Moshe Nissan the Torah teacher and Rabbi Avraham Abba the baker. These mystics would often disappear on secret missions of the Baal Shcm Tov, reappearing after their completion. They also had missions in Minsk itself. Only a few select followers of the Baal Shem Tov were aware of all these missions.

These mystics were known in the city as scholarly Jews of fine character. As such, they had become very friendly with Rabbi Moshe, especially as his home was so open for everyone. When they learned of his illustrious

lineage, their esteem for him grew, for the MAHARAL was venerated by mystics and Kabbalists, and more recently by followers of the Baal Shem Tov, who was known to hold the MAHARAL in especially high regard, directing his followers to study his works. It was only to be expected, then, that his secret followers in Minsk should feel special esteem for the MAHARAL'S descendant, Rabbi Moshe.

The Chassidim often came to Rabbi Moshe's home for extended Torah discussions and debates. They expected that he would eventually reveal to them, if not that he was actually one of them, at least his support of the Kabbalah and the practices of the mystics.

For a long time they got no clue from him about his attitude towards the Kabbalah. Although he was in fact an opponent of Kabbalah, Rabbi Moshe did not discuss the subject and the Chassidim had no idea where they stood with him.

Finally, after the Chassidim tried hard to get him to reveal his views on the Kabbalah, Rabbi Moshe started to show his opposition. He declared that he agreed with the Sages of the Talmud who state that study of the Kabbalah should be reserved for the select few and was not for everyone.

He went even further and declared that those who studied the Kabbalah were in danger of coming under the harmful influence of the surviving followers of Shabbetai Tzvi, the false Messiah who had misled so many Jews a generation earlier. This apprehension against studying Kabbalah was, of course, in complete contrast to the

Chassidic view.

The Chassidim soon saw Rabbi Moshe as an opponent, a fact that pained them deeply, especially in view of his lineage from the MAHARAL. They stayed away from him and stopped visiting his home, having nothing more to do with him.

Some of the Chassidim had sons studying in Yeshivos in Minsk who regularly ate their meals at Rabbi Moshe's home. Fearing that Rabbi Moshe's scholarship, wisdom and convincing rhetoric might sway their sons against the Kabbalah, they directed their sons to stay away from him. It was decided that the Chassidim should break off all relations with him.

That is how the rift with Rabbi Moshe came about.

His rejection by these secret Chassidim of Minsk — for no reason that he could fathom — caused the elderly scholar much anguish.

CHAPTER 51

GRANDFATHER AND GRANDCHILDREN

Devorah Leah and Baruch are estranged from their grandfather — Baruch wants to visit Minsk — Boruch's friendship with the son in law of the blacksmith of Dobromysl.

It is hard to understand why Rabbi Moshe, now living in Minsk, should have been estranged from his grandchildren Devorah Leah and Boruch, the children of his son Rabbi Schneur Zalman, especially as they had been left orphans.

Rabbi Schneur Zalman, unlike his other brothers, never had any desire to get involved in business, choosing instead the sacred profession of teaching Torah. That was why, when Rabbi Moshe and the rest of his family settled in Minsk, Rabbi Schneur Zalman settled in Vitebsk with his wife Rochel and their two children.

Rabbi Schneur Zalman put his whole heart into teaching his students. This so weakened his health that he passed away at an early age. Soon after, his learned wife Rochel also passed away.

Devorah Leah, who was deeply influenced by her pious late parents, was always eager to support herself. From a young age, she managed to do this by using her talents as a seamstress.

Her ability to support herself was enough reason for her not to go stay with her wealthy and respected grandfather in Minsk. If she had come, of course Rabbi Moshe would have gladly welcomed her to his home and taken care of all her needs until she would be married, and even afterwards, supporting her future husband so that he could study Torah undisturbed by financial worries.

Devorah Leah even shied away from staying with her uncle and aunt who lived in Vitebsk. Eventually, however, she agreed to stay with them, but only if they accepted her condition that she pay for her upkeep by her own handiwork. She continued this until her marriage to Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak, the llluy of Sharcye, and even after her wedding.

There was another reason Devorah Leah did not want

to leave Vitebsk. She did not want to be far from her beloved parents' resting place in the Jewish cemetery of Vitebsk.

Iler younger brother Boruch — destined later to become the lather of Rabbi Schncur Zalman of Liadi, author of the Tanya and founder of the Chabad school of Chassidism — had left Vitebsk at a young age, soon after his parents' passing. He had decided to follow his own path, dedicating himself to the study of Torah and the service of Gd and living by the toil of his own hands, just like his sister. He even secluded himself from his sister, rarely coming to see her even when he happened to pass through Vitebsk in the course of his wanderings.

Boruch, too, had apparently avoided visiting Minsk so that he would not have to visit his grandfather and possibly be compelled to benefit from his wealth or be inline need by his path in Judaism. He still needed time to find for himself the path in serving Gd that was most suitable lor him.

That is how both grandchildren became estranged from their grandfather, despite his distinguished lineage and outstanding reputation. They did not know him personally and were hardly aware of his prominence. Even when they did find out about it later, both had their own reasons for doubting whether they should become close to him.

Devorah Leah got to know details about her grandfather from none other than her fiance while they were still engaged. Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak, a secret Chossid

and follower of the Baal Shem Tov, had grown up in Minsk before leaving for Vitebsk. He knew Rabbi Moshe well, though little did he then suspect that one day he would be engaged to his granddaughter — at the suggestion of none other than the Baal Shem Tov himself.
The secret Chassidim of Minsk at first had befriended Rabbi Moshe, assuming that his descent from the MAHARAL — who was venerated by the Chassidim — meant he would be close to the Baal Shem Tov's teachings. But once they learned of his opposition to Kabbalah and to Chassidism and its followers, they began to keep their distance from him.
Devorah Leah, herself a staunch follower of the Baal Shem Tov and sharing her husband's views, began co feel resentment towards her grandfather. Sometimes she felt so embarrassed by her family relationship with such an outspoken opponent to Chassidism that she feared her husband might hold it against her. Either way, even after settling down to married life, Devorah Leah had no desire to get to know her grandfather.
Her brother Boruch, on the other hand, learned many details about his grandfather, Rabbi Moshe, from his friend Reb Yitzchak Shaul of Dobromysl, son-in law of the town smith Born in Horki — a town well known as a center of the mystics and, later, of Chassidim - Yitzchak Shaul had been raised in the spirit of Chassidism by his father, who was himself a mystic. Later, he had studied for some time at the Yeshivos of Minsk, where he had been guided in the service of G d by the local secret Chassidim.

Boruch stayed in Dobromysl for a long time because of his close friendship with Reb Yitzchak Shaul. He gleaned so much from Yitzchak Shaul's wealth of knowledge about Chassidus and its new path in serving G d, and felt deeply attracted to it.

From his many years spent in Minsk, Reb Yitzchak Shaul had much to recount about the city's mystics and the leading figures in its Jewish communal life, including Rabbi Moshe, the former leader of the Jewish community of Posen.

This was the first time Boruch was hearing significant details about his grandfather. In fact, Yitzchak Shaul was nor too well disposed towards Rabbi Moshe, regarding him as an opponent to Chassidus. Boruch, however, who still sought the right path for serving G'd, became curious to visit Minsk, where he could get to know his grandfathcr, feeling certain he could learn much from him, especially as he was known to be such a great scholar in Torah and worldly wisdom.

Boruch was excited by the thought of visiting Minsk, especially alter Yitzchak Shaul told him amazing stories about both renowned and concealed scholars and pious personalities of that city.

But precisely because he was learning so much from Yitzchak Shaul, Boruch found it hard to leave. He decided to stay for the time being in Dobromysl to continue their informative discussions. Not only did Yitzchak Shaul have unusual stories to tell, but he also repeated many teachings of the Baal Shem Tov and other Chassidic

leaders.

Boruch's meager savings were starting to dwindle, and he had to think once again of new ways to support himself. The time had also come to start thinking about his future in general. Because of his firm determination to live by the toil of his own hands, he wanted to make sure that he would never have to rely on anyone — not even on his immediate family.

He had for a long time been thinking about visiting Minsk. Something attracted him towards his grandfather. But he did not want to have to depend on anyone for his needs — not even his wealthy grandfather, although he would surely be eager to support him. If he was to realize his wish to visit that flourishing Jewish community, he had to make sure he would have enough funds for the journey and to support himself while traveling as well as during his stay there.

Boruch figured he could always find some menial job in Dobromysl or a nearby village — he had never been particular about what sort of work — to save up enough for his journey to Minsk. He might even do it in stages while he traveled, earning enough in one place to keep him going until the next place.

But that would take a long time , and it was not easy for him to earn his living and also save enough for the future.

Boruch was not afraid of hard work. Yet he didn't want to work full time either, for it would leave him too little time for Torah study and the service of G-d.

Therefore he always stipulated with every employer to work for an agreed number of hours by day or night, leaving him free at all other times. For such work, of course, payment was very little. Often Boruch had to work much harder than most people, yet for much less. While Boruch was carefully preparing his plans for the future — for he always planned everything in his life with great care — he found time every day to meet with Yitzchak Shaul lor long discussions. Yitzchak Shaul was very eager to tell his young friend stories and teachings of mystics and Chassidim. Indeed, Boruch was almost the only person in Dobromysl who listened to him with such great interest, with a burning thirst that couldn't be quenched.

Chassidus sparked Boruch's imagination. But he could not yet call himself a Chossid until he knew its teachings thoroughly. That's why he needed to absorb as much as he could from Yitzchak Shaul.

Boruch listened entranced to Yitzchak Shaul's latest story, which captivated his heart. The story connected the Rabbi of Horki — Yitzchak Shaul's hometown — and the Rabbi's wile, with the city of Minsk.

CHAPTER 52

THE TOWN OF H0RKI

A plague in town— The town "Mother" and "Grandmother" — The bathhouse-attendant of Minsk

Horki was a small town numbering about eighty

Jewish families. Yet, despite its size, it played a major role in the history of the mystics and Kabbalists and later, Chassidim.

The Jews of Horki were exceptionally Gdfearing and many of them were distinguished scholars as well. Even the simple laborers were learned.

It was said that in Horki it wasn't the scholars who were laborers, but rather the laborers who were scholars. Even the most simple was not completely ignorant. Jews such as Zalman the skinner, Tzadok Eliyahu the gardener, Zelig Tzvi the butcher and Avraham Yosef and Moshe Aharon the wagon drivers — even they were familiar with Torah books. As far as their religious devotion was concerned, they could compare favorably to the greatest scholars.

This enviable reputation enjoyed by Horki as a town of Torah scholarship and religious devotion was due largely to its Rabbi, Rabbi Nachman Yitzchak and to his wife, the righteous Sarah Rivkah.

Rabbi Nachman Yitzchak occupied the position of Rabbi in Horki for no less than sixty years.

During that time he instilled in the hearts and minds of his flock a fear of heaven and a love of learning. He also guided them in the learning of Torah until everyone was familiar with its most intricate details.

Rabbi Nachman Yitzchak was a unique personality,

He was a native of Minsk, where his father had been the town's bathhouse attendant and for most of his life was considered plain and unlearned. Only years later was it

discovered that this simple bathhouse attendant was indeed a great and highly pious scholar — a true hidden tzaddik. We will soon have more to say about this amazing personality.

Now, however, we will write about his son — Rabbi Nachman Yitzchak, the Rabbi of Horki, who was a great scholar and a gem of a person — a living example of kindness and fairncss. His congregants, who knew him intimately for so many years, said that they never heard a harsh word from him, for he loved and respected everyone. Even when he had to reprimand someone for a wrongdoing, he did it with deep love and compassion, his heart clearly aching lor having to rebuke a fellow Jew.

Rabbi Nachman Yitzchak's righteousness became particularly evident when a harsh plague broke out, taking the lives of many townsfolk. In the midst of the crisis he called a public meeting of everyone — men, women, and children, young and old. Ascending the Torah reading platform at the center of the Shul, he tearfully declared.

"Obviously this plague has befallen us because of our sins, for Gd would never bring such pain upon His children unless some grievous transgression had been committed. It is impossible for me to believe that anyone in outtown could have been so sinful.

“It must therefore be that the fault is with me. As Rashi comments on the verse (Devorim 1:13) "Vaasimcim Bcroshcichcm” — the blame for whatever happens to the Jewish people lies upon their religious leaders, who

should have guided them in the right path."

Upon hearing these powerful words, spoken with such humility by their beloved and righteous Rabbi, the assembled broke into tears and left the shut

Rabbi Nachman Yitzchak used to relate to his congregants as a father to his children. Just as a parent treats all his children as equally precious, so did he treat his congregants, speaking to each with consideration and love and guiding them to develop virtuous qualities of character.

He established a remarkable system for therunning of Horki's commercial life. Only on market days, when peasants from the surrounding villages converged on Horki, did all twelve stores in Horki stay open. On the other days, when there was much less business, only three stores at a time would take turns to stay open for business. This gave all storekeepers ample opportunity for Torah study and for other spiritual pursuits. It also prevented them from begrudging each other every time someone had the good fortune to get a customer on the slower days. Under these pressing conditions, storekeepers would tend to quarrel and lower their prices to below cost so as to undercut the competition.

The Rabbi established yet another beneficial business practice. All of Horki's storekeepers were to participate equally in supplying merchandise to the mansions of the three local wealthy nobles living nearby. Only at the time of the annual hunting season, when the nobility gathered in Horki for their great hunt through the surrounding

villages, did the Rabbi permit all Jews of the town equal rights to sell merchandise to the hunters, so that everyone could benefit and make money.

All these innovative business practices brought peace and harmony to the town of Horki, ensuring that the townsfolk never experienced envy or strife.

Much of the credit for the town's high spiritual level was due also to Rabbi Nachman Yitzchak's wife, Rcbbetzin Sarah Rivkah.

This unusually fine woman devoted herself constantly to helping poor brides, visiting the sick and other kind deeds. She participated in everyone's celebrations. Whether it was a circumcision, Bar Mitzva, engagement or wedding, she made sure it should be celebrated as beautifully as possible. On the other hand, at occasions lor mourning such as a funeral, G d forbid, the Rebbetzin would always make sure that everyone in the town should share the pain of the bereaved and help to ease their burden She herself was always the first to console those visited by misfortune and to help out with whatever they needed.

Above all, Rcbbetzin Sarah Rivkah taught the women virtuous conduct and refined character traits, serving as a living example of refinement. As a result, there was no quarreling, cursing or slandering among the women, nor jealousy or hate, if on occasion a newcomer would settle in Horki, someone whose character traits were not up to par, she would receive the Rcbbetzen's kind attention, given with such love and patience, that the newcomer was

sure to become a changed person.

On summer days at set times, the Rebbetzin would sit on the porch of her house, which was in the middle of town, with the women gathered around her, and she would teach them the stories of Chumash, Midrashim and other sacred books. She explained everything carefully and precisely, always making sure to bring out a practical lesson. In the winter months she had these gatherings in her home where she continued to inspire and impress her listeners with these stories and their interpretations.

As a result, the Rebbetzin was beloved and respected by all the women of Horki. The older women would call her "Mother," and the younger ones "Grandma." Such was her reputation in Horki and the surrounding towns that she was known among them as "the holy Rebbetzin."

Sarah Rivkah was born in Minsk, as was her husband, and her story was just as fascinating as his.

Rabbi Nachman Yitzchak's father, as mentioned, was the attendant of the public bathhouse of Minsk. His name was Shimon Leib. Although in a large city like Minsk such a job would seem to be quite decent, Shimon Leib was not highly regarded by the townsfolk. After all, the job was still a very menial one.

Actually, Shimon Leib had an unusually radiant face, with a fine beard that added to his charm. His eyes too bespoke a keen wisdom and intelligence.

Yet no one paid him much attention. After all, he was no more than a bathhouse attendant and as such, was naturally considered plain and unlearned. He was never

heard to quote teachings of outSages, nor even a verse of

Chumash, a real ignoramus. All that was known about him was that he paid his weekly dues to the city's Psalms society — a pursuit usually reserved for the most ignorant Jews — and often attended their regular meetings to recite the Psalms.

Since he didn't have to heat the baths every day, Shimon Leib had plenty of free time, time which he spent idling about in the streets and befriending the street people. This behavior certainly did not do much to enhance his reputation; it only confirmed everyone's not too favorable impression of him.

ButShimon Leib was well known for one outstanding virtue — his generosity. The little money he had managed to scrape together — probably over many years — was always being lent out to the poor. In fact, precisely because he roamed the streets, he was familiar with those in need ol cash for buying merchandise that they could trade to support their families. What was even more unusual was that Shimon Leib did not wait for others to approach him for a loan, but anticipated their needs as if he knew exactly when they needed it.

Shimon Leib's outstanding generosity was expressed not only with money. He would regularly deliver sacks of potatoes or floutto poor Torah scholars, widows and other needy people. This tall and lanky figure, clearly of great strength, carried the sacks of food with ease and brought smiles to the many unfortunates.

Yet, despite all these admirable deeds, the people of Minsk paid Shimon Leib little attention. Minsk, after all, was a city of Torah scholarship and no one had much regard for the simple and the unlearned.

CHAPTER 53

THE SHAMASH AND HIS DAUGHTER

The secret match — A remarkable wedding — ¯The mystics of Minsk —The bathhouse attendant's son is an outstanding Torah scholar.

Reb Yonasan was the Shamash of one of the Shuls of Minsk. He and his wife Basha Rochel may have preferred a son, but when Gd blessed them with a daughter, she was just as dear to them.

Right from the start, they decided to teach their beloved daughter, Sarah Rivkah as much as they would have taught a boy. This meant that they would teach her Torah from a very young age, regardless of the custom of that time not to teach girls Torah at all.

Reb Yonasan himself taught Sarah Rivkah. First he taught her to read, then Chumash (the Five Books of the Torah) and NaCh (the other Scriptures), proceeding to the Mishnah and Talmud, Agadah and Midrash.

This was all kept secret. One couldn't tell what people in Minsk — especially those who attended Reb Yonasan's Shul — would think if they had discovered that Sarah Rivkah was being taught Torah.

Over the years, Sarah Rivkah grew up to become a real Torah scholar. Of course, she was also educated in a

spirit of fine character training and virtuous qualities. These were reflected in her obvious kindness and modesty, to her own credit and that of her parents.

When Sarah Rivkah turned seventeen, a proposal for a shidduch came from one of the congregants of the shui where her father Rabbi Yonasan served as Shamash Reb Meir Nosson the storekeeper wished to have the good' hearted and modest Sarah Rivkah as his daughter in law. He was well aware that Reb Yonasan could afford neither dowry nor the support of his son in law's Torah study alter their marriage. Nevertheless, he was prepared to pay all wedding expenses and even the bride's trousseau, so long as he could get such a fine Jewish daughter as a wife bar his son.

Reb Yonasan, however, gave no reply — neither yes or no.

Rabbi Meir Nosson did not see this as a rejection. He attributed it to Reb Yonasan's reticent nature, for he was known to keep silent most of the time. Surely he was eager for this match, reasoned Reb Meir Nosson, for the terms he was offering should seem irresistible to the impoverished Shamash .

But when Reb Meir Nosson sent the matchmaker to trv again and then a third time, he still received no clear answer He decided on a more practical approach. Instead of sending a matchmaker he sent a close friend, and not to the girl's father but to her mother. Basha Rochel, who was considered to be more sensible than her quiet and impractical husband.

Basha Rochel did give him an answer — a clear refusal. She also gave a reason: Her daughter Sarah Rivkah had already been promised to someone else, an arrangement made while she was still a baby, as a good sign for long life.

In other words, they were not rejecting Reb Meir Nosson, but had a good reason for not accepting his offer.

Basha Rochel did not disclose the name of the boy to whom her daughter was engaged, nor was anyone much interested at the time. Little did anyone suspect that the engagement was connected with a wondrous occurrence.

For, after all, it was not unusual in those days for parents to arrange their children's engagement while they were still very young.

Within a few months, the name of Sarah Rivkah's fiancé became known. He was none other than the outstanding young scholar, Rabbi Nachman Yitzchak, son of Reb Shimon Leib, the town's bathhouse attendant, who had by that time passed away. After his passing, his son revealed that he had been a hidden tzaddik.

The two fathers had arranged this match when their children were very young. People started to realize that if Reb Shimon Leib, who had been a hidden tzaddik, had chosen Reb Yonason's daughter for his son, then Reb Yonasan must also be a hidden tzaddik.

This remarkable match became the talk of Minsk.

Many people envied Reb Yonasan's good fortune to be getting as his son in law the outstanding young scholar. Rabbi Nachman Yitzchak, whom so many of the city's

prominent families had wanted for their daughters. Everyone now showered the Shamash with the traditional Mazal Tov wishes. But Reb Yonasan barely acknowledged their good wishes, remaining his usual reticent self. Even if someone commented on his great privilege to be getting such a scholarly son in law. he

didn't react much except for a gentle smile which crossed his lips.

A date was set for the wedding. Many assumed that, as befitting such a special bridegroom, Reb Yonason would make an impressive affair. Although he was poor, as one would expect a Shamash to be, it was still assumed that together with his wife's earnings as a midwife, he would somehow manage to arrange suitable delicacies for the occasion. Besides, the congregants of his shul would gladly help out, perhaps not so much for his sake as for the sake of his future son in law, whose genius was the talk of the town.

However, it did not occur to Reb Yonasan to accept the slightest help from anyone — not for any reason and not even to make his daughter's wedding nicer. He did not even make any special effort to find funds for the wedding.

When the wedding finally took place, the guests he invited were a strange and pitiful sight indeed. Fourof them were residents of the town's poorhouse, wearing old. worn coats — the type of people who would never get a second glance from anyone. In addition, he also

invited six or seven of the town's beggars who went from house to house in Minsk begging for alms. Two more were just guests, who happened to be staying over at the shul where Reb Yonason served as Shamash. It was these two guests whom he honored to officiate at the wedding ceremony. After the wedding feast, one of these two was given the honor of reciting the Shcva Brochos (seven special wedding blessings).

Many townsfolk did not even realize the wedding was taking place and only found out about it the day after.

The young couple went to live in the home of the groom's mother adjoining the city's bathhouse, which she, as widow of the late bathhouse attendant, still operated.

The next day, the prominent Torah scholars of Minsk, who had not been invited to the wedding, came to congratulate the newlywed Rabbi Nachman Yitzchak. Since he had not delivered any scholarly Torah discourse at his wedding feast, he used the opportunity to deliver it now. Everyone was overwhelmed with its depth.

Before long, the townsfolk of Minsk started thinking of how they could support this young scholar. He was offered the position of Rosh Yeshiva of any of the city's many Yeshivos. Any of them would have been honored to have him, but he declined. In all modesty, he could not see himself in a position of teaching others when he still had so much to learn himself.

Indeed, he now continued his studies with even more diligence and enthusiasm than before.

Meanwhile, people began to take an interest in Rabbi Nachman Yitzchak's father-in-law, Reb Yonasan the Shamash. They started to realize that he was not what he appeared to be. If the hidden tzaddik, Reb Shimon Leib had left instructions before his passing for his scholarly son to marry Reb Yonasan's daughter, then Reb Yonasan too must be a hidden tzaddik. They recalled how his wife had explained that the match had been made many years before when the young couple were still babies. Considering that Reb Shimon Leib was a hidden tzaddik, he would have made such a match only with another of his kind.

They were further convinced of this by the fact that Reb Yonasan was so silent and acted so secretively. Now it was remembered how for many years Reb Yonasan used to sleep behind the furnace in the men's section of the shul, while Basha Rochel used to sleep separately in the women's section — indicating his unusual abstention from worldly concerns, as was then the custom of some exalted personalities.

No wonder, then, that the townsfolk began to scrutinize the Shamash very carefully. Basha Rochel too got her share of their attention as they watched her every move and hung on to her every word.

The Shamash and his wife started to feel uncomfortable with all this unwelcome and unexpected attention, especially as they naturally had what to hide. The time had not yet come for them to be revealed as hidden tzaddikim and it was quite possible that Reb

Yonasan hoped to remain concealed for the rest of his life.

One day. Reb Yonasan and Basha Rochel suddenly left Minsk. No one had a clue where they had gone. It was assumed however, that as a hidden tzaddik who did not wish to be noticed, he felt he could no longer stay in Minsk.

Their daughter Sarah Rivkah naturally remained with her husband in Minsk. Most people were still unaware of her great scholarship. In any case, her husband's scholarship attracted so much attention that her special qualities were hardly noticed.

As everyone knew, the young couple's support came from the income of the bathhouse, which was now operated by Rabbi Nachman Yitzchak's mother. Now her daughter in law, Sarah Rivkah started helping her in her work.

When the Jews of Minsk came to use the bathhouse — men and women at their different times — they felt a twinge of pain at the sight of the two women working so hard. Neither of the two, however, would even think of seeking some other source of income.

Several years thus passed and Sarah Rivkah was now the mother of two children. Their situation however did not change. Rabbi Nachman Yitzchak continued with his Torah studies, while his mother and his wife continued with their work at the bathhouse.

CHAPTER 54

FROM CARETAKER TO RABBI

The bathhouse attendant declines the position of Rosh Yeshiva

Rabbi and teacher in Horki

Boruch learns from the smith's son in law.

During their first fouryears of marriage, the young Gaon, Rabbi Nachman Yitzchak, and his wife, Sarah Rivkah stayed at the home of his widowed mother, who operated the town bathhouse of Minsk. During this time, Sarah Rivkah gave birth to a son and a daughter. Rabbi Nachman Yitzchak devoted himself with great diligence to his studies, while Sarah Rivkah helped her mother in law at the bathhouse.

When his mother, the widow of the hidden tzaddik Reb Shinton Leib, passed away, the Jewish community leaders of Minsk faced two pressing problems: Who should now operate the bathhouse and how should they support Rabbi Nachman Yitzchak and his young family. They had long maintained that it was not in accordance with his dignity as a respected Torah scholar to be supported by his mother from income she earned from the bathhouse. They would have preferred that he accept a position as Rosh Yeshiva. But Rabbi Nachman Yitzchak had insisted that his mother keep the bathhouse and the community leaders had agreed to respect his wishes.

Now, however, after his mother’s passing, the

community leaders felt it was time for him to leave the bathhouse.

This time too, Rabbi Nachman Yitzchak declined their well-meant suggestions. He insisted on staying at the bathhouse, explaining that during the twelve months of mourning for his mother, he should remain in her home to conduct daily prayers and study of the Mishna for her soul, as is customary in homes of the departed.

By now, everyone had come to appreciate his departed mother's special qualities and had even come to revere her. As the wife of the hidden tzaddik Reb Shimon Leib and mother of the Gaon Rabbi Nachman Yitzchak they reasoned, she too must have been outstandingly righteous. So they could sympathize with her son's desire to honor his dear mother's memory. The community leaders therefore agreed to let him stay at the bathhouse for the next twelve months.

While his wife Sarah Rivkah continued to support her family by operating the bathhouse, Rabbi Nachman Yitzchak continued his studies. In memory of his mother, he taught Mishna after prayers every day at his home. These daily Mishna lessons aroused keen interest in the city. The greatest scholars of Minsk flocked to his home to hear them and were amazed at his outstanding interpretations and original insights. This earned him an even greater reputation.

The community waited eagerly for the year of mourning to pass so that he would finally accept a position as Rosh }'eshiva in one of the city's many Yeshivos ,

They were even ready to establish a new yeshiva for him, since for his scholarship was so outstanding that many students would be eager to come and listen to his brilliant lectures.

It was therefore a shock for the whole city to discover that Rabbi Nachman Yitzchak was unwilling to become a Rosh Yeshiva. The community leaders thought they might still sway him by absolutely refusing to renew his lease to the bathhouse, which they did, arguing that it was totally unacceptable for such a Gaon to remain a bathhouse attendant.

Rabbi Nachman Yitzchak realized that he could not get the communal leaders of Minsk to agree with him and so felt he had no choice but to leave town. Together with his wife and children he moved to Lemberg (now known as Lvov).

The Jews of Minsk were brokenhearted to have lost such a Gaon. But it was too late. Rabbi Nachman Yitzchak had his principles and nothing anyone would say could have changed this.

Rabbi Nachman Yitzchak chose Lemberg as his destination because that was where his wife's parents, Reb Yonasan and Basha Rochel had moved from Minsk alter their identity as hidden tzaddikim was discovered there.

For about ten years, Rabbi Nachman Yitzchak lived in Lemberg with his in laws. He and his father-in-law were able to study ר orah full time because their righteous waxes worked as midwives and seamstresses to support

the families.

During the eleventh year, father-in-law and son-in-law decided to leave on a self-imposed exile — for their own self-improvement and to find ways of improving the world and helping others,

For two years they wandered from place to place, not staying overnight where they had spent the day and not spending the day where they had stayed overnight. Wherever they went, they took care not to give any impression that they were scholars or even anyone special.

Most likely they had special missions to accomplish on their travels.

After some time, they finally reached the town of Horki, where Rabbi Nachman Yitzchak decided to stay. At that time, the town had neither Torah teacher nor Rabbi. At first he served as Torah teacher there. Later, he started to rule on Torah law too and before long, he accepted also the position of the town's official Rabbi. The town was small and the size of his salary was of little concern to him.

Once he saw how much the Jews of Horki wanted him to stay, he sent for his wife and children to come and join him. So that is how Rabbi Nachman Yitzchak became the spiritual leader of the modest town of Horki, when in fact he could easily have become Rabbi of the greatest Jewish communities, given his abilities.

Rabbi Nachman Yitzchak was much more than the Rabbi of Horki. He became a personal guide and

counselor to everyone in the town, young and old. Just as he taught the men, his Rebbetzin Sarah Rivkah taught the women. The two became father and mother to their beloved townsfolk. The people of the town, in turn, related to them as if to true parents.

THEL1BAV1TCHER RABBI'S MEMOIRS

Under the leadership of such a devoted Rabbi and Rebbetzin, the population of Horki increased, as did its prestige as a community. Rabbi Nachman Yitzchak worked hard to ensure that everyone should study Torah regularly. He succeeded to such an extent that in the course of several years even the plain Jews became learned.

As Rahbi of the town, he encouraged everyone to select scholarly young men as husbands for their daughters. Over the years, dozens of such young Torah scholars came to settle in Horki and were able to grow in learning, thanks to the financial support of their fathers in law during their first years after marriage.

In addition, Rabbi Nachman Yitzchak opened a yeshiva in Horki itself. It produced many young scholars of a high caliber, for whom he tried to make matches with daughters of the townsfolk. The yeshiva and its students had a positive effect on Horki and the entire surrounding region.

Reb Yitzchak Shaul, son in law of the blacksmith of Dobromysl, who had befriended Boruch — the future lather of the founder ol Chabad — and who had introduced him to the teachings of Chassidus, had been a

student at that yeshiva in Horki.

This story of the Rabbi and Rebbetzin of Horki that Yitzchak Shaul told Boruch, connected the city of Minsk, from where Rabbi Nachman Yitzchak and his Rebbetzin originated with the town of Horki, which was distinguished as an early center of Chassidim.

Boi uch was especially intrigued by Minsk, which was where his grandfather Rabbi Moshe, the one-time community leader of Posen, now lived. He was weighing the idea of visiting Minsk and getting to know his esteemed and scholarly grandfather.

But before he would be ready to leave Dobromysl, Boruch felt he needed to learn even more about Chassidus and those who spread its teachings. Reb Yitzchak Shaul had plenty to tell him, not only about the Baal Shcm Tov's followers, who included his own father, but also about the Baal Shcm Tov himself.

It pained Reb Yitzchak Shaul that he had never met the Baal Shem Tov. When he mentioned this, it pained Boruch too, for he was sure that had Yitzchak Shaul met the Baal Shem Tov, he would have been able to learn from him many more details about the founder of Chassidus, gaining a far more precise understanding of this great leader and his ways. Now he could judge only by second-hand reports he heard about him from Yitzchak Shaul.

But that was not enough to satisfy Boruch. Although his heart was drawn to Chassidus, he felt a need to learn and investigate much more before he could make the decision to become a Chossid and follower of the holy

Baal Shem Tov.

He decided to stay in Dobromysl a while longer. He wanted to continue drawing from the wellsprings of Chassidus that his friend Yitzchak Shaul so willingly helped him with. He also hoped to earn some money, both for his keep in Dobromysl, as well as for his future wanderings.

He discussed the matter with Yitzchak Shaul, who assisted his father in law at the smithy where he had learned the trade well and earned a fine living from it. His exceptional talent at forging new ploughshares and harrows and fixing old ones, attracted many peasants and nobility, who gave him and his father-in-law a great amount of business.

It occurred to Boruch that he could be of great help to Yitzchak Shaul and his father-in-law at the smithy. His friend readily accepted and offered him a worthwhile wage.

Boruch had decided to stay two more months in Dobromysl, working at the smithy and learning Torah in his free time. Yitzchak Shaul welcomed his decision, but for another reason altogether.

He hadn't yet mentioned it to Boruch, but an idea was slowly formulating in his mind. Boruch was now at a suitable age for marriage and Yitzchak Shaul felt he would make an excellent match for his sister. He had already written about this suggestion to his father, but it would take several weeks for his letter to arrive and then for him to get a reply. So he was happy that Boruch was staying

with him for a while longer, for he obviously couldn't tell him anything until his father agreed.

Boruch, in turn, was keeping his own secret from Yitzchak Shaul — that he was actually more or less engaged to the daughter of Reb Avraham, the gardener. Meanwhile, though, he was wandering around the Jewish world in search of a path in the service of G-d that could satisfy his thirsting soul.

Boruch's extended stay in Dobromysl was spent in work and Torah study and, when he felt the need, in isolated meditation

CHAPTER 55

A GUARANTEE FOR GAN EDEN

Boruch learns about his brother in-law — A story about Eliyahu HaNOVI — Surprising behavior for a scholar.

From his young friend, the learned blacksmith Reb Yitzchak Shaul, Boruch learned much about his celebrated grandfather Rabbi Moshe, the one time head of the Jewish community of Posen. But he hardly expected that while helping Yitzchak Shaul at the smithv in Dobromysl, he would also hear about his own brother in-law Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak, the husband of his sister Devorah Leah, who was known as the llluy of Shareye and who now headed the yeshiva in Vitebsk.

Not only was Boruch surprised to hear what was told about his brother-in-law, but also was surprised from whom he heard it and how the name came up in

conversation.

In truth, it was in the very smithy where Boruch worked that heated discussions were taking place about his brother-in-law Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak of Vitebsk Boruch listened to it all with his characteristic reticence, making no mention to anyone of the fact that the subject of their arguments, the llluy of Shareye. was actually his brother-in-law.

As a rule, Boruch never spoke about himself or his distinguished family. He just listened to what others had to say and tried to learn from whomever he could But he never revealed himself as being anything special, priding himself for his Torah knowledge or his celebrated family.

Deep inside however, Boruch's heart swelled with joy that his brother in law's fame had reached even the insignificant town of Dobromysl. What impressed him most was what he heard about Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak, which made it clear that he was not just a scholar, for whom Torah study is most important, but also a man of fine character and deeds. To Boruch. this combination strongly suggested that his brother in law might be a follower of the Baal Shem Tov, like his friend Yitzchak Shaul.

How did Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak's name come to be mentioned at the smithy? Early in the spring, the smithy became very busy. Peasants came to ger their ploughs, harrows and carts mended and their horses shoed. It was so busy that it became a meeting place for many of the

town's Jews who didn't have much to do with themselves. From time to time, more scholarly Jews, too, would come into the smithy to speak with Yitzchak Shaul. One such Jew was Reb Yerucham Fishel, a strong opponent of Chassidus who was unaware that Reb Yitzchak Shaul was actually a Chossid. He liked visiting him because he had a high regard for his scholarship and enjoyed discussing Torah with him.

Reb Yitzchak Shaul, therefore kept his discussions with Reb Yerucham Fishel limited to Torah learning, knowing full well that any mention of the new Chassidic philosophy or the Baal Shorn Tov would only aggravate matters. The young Boruch did likewise.

The smithy held a particular attraction for Reb Yerucham Fishel for it had become "a meeting place for the wise." Although the owner of the smithy, Eliezer Reuven, was unlearned, he had managed to marry off each of his three daughters to Torah scholars and to send his only son, Shmuel Nochum, to study in a yeshiva.

Recently in fact, right after Pcsach, Shmuel Nochum had left to study at one of the Yeshivos in Vitebsk. He had traveled to Vitebsk with Zcvulun Binyomin, who, as we know, was once a skinner of carcasses and very ignorant of Torah, but now, under Eliezer Reuven's influence, had become more familiar with Torah.

On his return, Zcvulun Binyomin stopped by at the smithy to report on his trip. Of all the Yeshivos in Vitebsk, he said, Shmuel Nochum had preferred the yeshiva of Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak, Boruch's brother in law, to all the

others.

That is how Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak's name came to be mentioned at the Dobromysl smithy. But that was not all. The plain and unlearned Zcvulun Binyomin, speaking about Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak, simply could not find enough words of praise for him for the words of Torah he had heard from him.

“Now that’s what I call a real scholar," declared Zcvulun Binyomin. "Even I, as unlearned as I am, was able to understand him!”

While accompanying Shmuel Nochum to the veshna, he told them, he had the good fortune to hear the opening lecture of Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak, which was attended as usual, by many Jews of the town as well, both learned and , unlearned.

Everyone appreciated these lectures because Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak did not limit himself to profound Talmudic scholarship. In the opening section he always introduced edifying ethical teachings and Agadah subjects that even unlearned Jews could understand. For him, Talmudic scholarship and Agadah were two worlds. He always found subjects of Agadah to explain and always derived from them some moral lesson to which all could relate.

Zevulun Binyomin excitedly repeated what he had heard from the Rush Yeshiva: “It was such a pleasure listening to him. Just imagine me sitting among the yeshiva students and learned townsfolk, listening to the Illuy speaking and actually understanding every word coming

from his mouth! 1 could hardly believe it myself. But let me tell you what 1 heard there, and you see for yourselves whether or not it was above my level of understanding. It was a story that even my mind could grasp: 1 his is the story he told...

“There once was a very learned Jew who came to an unfamiliar town. He met Eliyahu HaNovi there and asked him to let him know which of the townsfolk were righteous enough to be guaranteed a reward in Gan Eden and the World to Come. No doubt, he needed to know with whom to associate and who could be trusted.

“Eliyahu HaNovi answered him: ‘Do not ask this of me. You can easily find it out for yourself. For a wise man, it is not difficult to discover who is upright and deserving of Gan Eden and who is not.’

Eliyahu HaNovi now tested this learned wayfarer to see whether he could correctly determine on his own who were the Jews deserving of Gan Eden and who not.

The learned Jew promptly set out in search of the worthy individuals. His first stop, of course, was at the town’s Beth Hamidrash — for where else would he find fine, righteous, G d fearing Jews if not in a place of Torah study? Eliyahu followed the stranger and observed him carefully as he went about making his choices.

“As the guest entered the Beth Hamidrash, he was fascinated by the sight of so many impressive looking Jews sitting over open volumes of the Talmud and other Torah works, engrossed in study. Clearly, the wayfarer was convinced, for these Jews Torah study was

everything. If so, he thought, are any Jews holier or better than these? Surely these must be the ones who are guaranteed to receive their reward in Gan Eden. After all, ‘the study of Torah is equivalent to them all’ - to all other good deeds.

“Eliyahu Ha-Novi now called him and said: ‘Yes, you are right, these Jews have certainly earned themselves a place in the World to Come. But this is not everything. Come and I will show you other Jews who are earning their share in the World to Come with their deeds.'

“He led the wayfarer outside into the marketplace. There, he pointed to two poor Jews, whose faces betrayed how poorly fed they were. Their clothes, held together by a simple string, were worn out and full of patches. 1 hey looked no different than any other tattered paupers who wandered the streets.

“These two Jews had gathered about them other poor Jews, young and old, who were clearly depressed by their suffering. The two started telling the Jews around them stories. Both were excellent narrators who knew well how to tell a story and a joke too. Hearing their stories and jokes, the Jews around them soon started perking up, smiles lighting up their troubled faces.

“’Do you see these two Jews?’ Eliyahu Ha’Novi asked the learned wayfarer. ‘They have acquired their reward in Gan Eden. they too arc poor and have nothing to offer to help anyone materially. But they help the unfortunate with their words and their stories, uplifting their spirits and making these heavyhearted Jews happy. They give the

poor a chance to forget their poverty and the sick to forget their suffering."'

Zevulun Binyomin concluded with the lesson the Illuy of Shareye had derived from this story: Even one who is not a Torah scholar can be a fine Jew, by doing good deeds, and even deeds that may seem very ordinary. To the unlearned Zevulun Binyomin, this was just what he needed to hear. It gave him a direction in life to which he could relate very well. No wonder he was so impressed by the Rosh Yeshiva!

After listening to Zevulun Binyomin's account, Yitzchak Shaul smiled knowingly. Boruch too was heartened by the story — it spoke his language as well. But there was another reason why Boruch was so happy to hear this story, although he didn't show it. He was proud to hear such wonderful praise about his own brother in law about whom, unfortunately, he knew so little. In fact, from what he had just heard, he felt sure his sister's husband was no ordinary scholar but one who sought, or had already found, a new path in serving G d.

Among those listening to Zevulun Binyomin's story at the smithy was the scholarly Reb Yerucham Fishel. He had known Zcvulun Binyamin for many years and considered him an utter ignoramus. The very audacity of such a simple, coarse man to even dare to speak about a great scholar of the stature of the llluy of Shareye. sent him into a rage. How, in his stupidity, could Zcvulun Binyamin even attempt to measure the Illuy's greatness by a simple tale — even one that held a moral lesson?

Reb Yerucham Fishel was so furious at Zevulun Binyomin that he berated him fiercely with the lowest of insults, certainly not befitting a scholar of his standing. Everyone at the smithy, especially Yitzchak Shaul and Boruch, was absolutely flabbergasted at Reb Yerucham Fishel's behavior, so unbecoming for a scholar This was only further proof for them that a Jew whose only emphasis was on Torah learning, is far from accomplished and far from the teachings of the Baal Shem Tov.
Reb Yitzchak Shaul and Boruch had much to talk about after this incident. They tried to console Zevulun Binyomin and to encourage him not to feel upset by the lowly insults hurled at him by Reb Yerucham Fishel.
Boruch was gradually learning more about his family and its celebrated members

CHAPTER 56

A COLONY OF MYSTICS

A Jewish farm settlement — "Lucky" produce

Reb Boruch Batkin's brother, Reb Dovid and his son Kaddish.

Boruch , who would one day become the father of the founder of Chabad Chassidus, was so estranged from his family — even from his sister — that he had to learn about his distinguished family members from strangers, mainly from the town of Dobromysl. It was in that town that he befriended Reb Yitzchak Shaul, whom he assisted at the smithy and from whom he learned

Chassidus. From this young scholar he heard many wonderful stories about his own family.

At one of these storytelling sessions, Boruch listened spellbound — and with much concealed satisfaction — to thestory of his uncle, Reb Kaddish, who lived in Vitebsk and at whose home his sister Devorah Leah had been living when she got married.

Reb Kaddish was the son of Reb Dovid, brother of Boruch's maternal grandfather, Reb Boruch Batlan — as he was called in his hometown of Posen — after whom Boruch was named.

Both Reb Dovid and his brother Reb Boruch Batlan were mystics and followers of Rabbi Yoel Baal Shem of Zamoshch. But Reb Dovid's lifestyle was very different Irom his brother's. He had lived together with several other Kabbalists in a village about fifteen miles from Posen, where they farmed the land and lived a peaceful life. Like their forefathers for many generations and like most Jews originating from Spain and Portugal, they followed the path of the Kabbalah.

The customs of the earlier mystics were very different from those of the mystics in outstory. The mystics of old lived recluse and ascetic lives — whereas these mystics did not; although at first glance it may have seemed that their lifestyle was quite austere. They tilled the soil and did not live as hermits. On the other hand, they did lead lives of relative solitude, having little to do with each other beyond joining for daily communal prayer.

Although Reb Dovid was an admirer of Rabbi Yoel

Baal Shem, he did not visit him regularly or frequently — unlike his brother Reb Boruch who would travel to visit him at regular times every year.

The small farming community' where Rabbi Dovid lived was well known throughout the region. Unlike other farmers, these Kabbalists had no need to bring their grain, fruit and vegetables from their fields, orchards and gardens, nor the wool of their sheep, to sell in the nearby towns. In their case, customers flocked to them to buy their products.

Ten years after this settlement of Jewish farmers was established, a merchant came from Prague with a tempting offer to buy their entire stock of produce all at once and at a handsome price.

The farmer Kabbalists found themselves in a predicament. They had always done business with many dealers, selling their produce to them gradually throughout the year. Now they called a meeting to consider the new offer.

THE UBAVITCHER RABBPS MEMOIRS I

I

Opinions at the meeting varied. Some argued that it was not right to take business away from so many dealers whose livelihood depended on them and who would stand to lose if this deal were to be approved.

It was decided to refer the question to the settlement's elders and to its two Torah teachers to decide. their decision was that regardless of how attractive the Prague merchant's offer sounded, they could

not deprive other dealers of their livelihood.

It seems that the merchant had come all the way from Prague ready to buy all their produce because a report had spread there that the produce of the Kabbalists' farming settlement carried good luck.

They called their colony, where each had his own plot of land, "Artzos Ha'Chaim" - the "lands of life."

Miraculous talcs began to circulate about this phenomenon. People were saying that a certain Reb Peretz, owner of a local distillery, was able to brew four or live times as much liquor from the potatoes and grain which he purchased from the mystics as from any other potatoes and grain Besides which, the quality and taste were also far superior.

It was also said of Reb Shimon the storekeeper, that when he had bought spun wool and flax from the Artzos HaChaim settlement, he made a fortune from it.

When these wondrous tales reached the nearby city of Posen, demand for the Kabbalists' produce rose sharply. In fact, there was a stampede to buy their products.

The mystics could have easily raised their prices, but they remained loyal to their original customers and kept their prices fair. They even refused the Prague merchant's offer to buy up their entire stock for an unusually high price.

A businessman from Posen came up with what he thought to be a smart plan and a lucrative business opportunity. He bought a plot of land adjacent to Artzos HaChayim, hoping to expand the settlement, and

proposed to the Kabbalists that they farm his land, too. He would absorb all expenses in exchange for only part of the profit. Butthe mystics promptly refused this offer as not being in keeping with their high standards of conduct.

This remarkable colony had two Torah teachers lor the Kabbalists' children. Reb Naftoli taught young children and Reb Shimon taught Gemora to the older children. In addition, there lived the elderly teacher in rhe colony, Reb Yaakov Kopel, who gave in depth Talmud lessons to teenage students. All three were members of the Kabbalists and followers of Rabbi Yoel Baal Shem of Zamoshch.

Although it was customary for these teachers not to reach their students Kabbalah until they turned eighteen, the spirit of Kabbalah permeated their teachings long before that. This was apparent not only in the stories that they told their students but also in the character training they gave them.

Even Reb Naftoli worked to instill in his young charges a deep reverence for the holiness inherent in the Alef-Bcis, the letters of the Hebrew alphabet.

"My holy flock," he would say to his little students, "you are learning the Alef Bcis, those special, holy letters with which G d created the universe and by which He also gave His Torah to the Jewish people through His servant, Moshe Rabbeinu."

Reb Shimon the Gemora teacher used to emphasize to his students that when we repeat Torah teachings, even if

those who taught them have long ago passed on to the "World of Truth," their lips start to move in their graves and their souls in Gan Eden thrill in delight. They reward those who study their Torah teachings by giving them their blessing. Reb Shimon explained that this is why our Sages taught that when we repeat Torah teachings in the name of the one who taught it, it is as if he is standing before us. The Tannaim and Amoraim whom we mention in outTorah study are all present with us. Therefore we ought to show them great respect while in their presence.

It was in this Artzos Ha'Chayim settlement that Reb Kaddish was born. His father Reb Dovid was considered by the settlement's other Kabbalists as a great scholar — both in the revealed and esoteric aspects of the Torah. Reb Dovid was a spiritual person, yet at the same time cold and exacting. He never got excited about anything. He shared in the joy or pain of others only because the Torah so required, not because he had a feeling about it. Their joy or pain did not move him at all. Laughter or tears were the same to him; he could have just as much cried as laughed. He was as dry as a bone.

Of course, Reb Dovid conducted himself in accordance with the directives of outholy books - but without any warmth. On Tisha B'Av he was sad and on Simchas Torah he rejoiced, but only because that's what the Torah expected of him. He even infused these deeds with all the deeper meditations taught in the Kabbalah and yet. he remained cold both inside and outside.

His son Kaddish showed great aptitude from an early

age. He was an only son, and his mother Tzivia showered him with love. By nature he was not at all like his father but more similar to his cheerful and goodmatured mother. Yet, observing how his father was so restrained, cold and morose, Kaddish became like him, probably subconsciously and against his true nature.

His education was like that of other children of the Artzos Ha'Chayim settlement. He started his studies under Reb Naftoli, the teacher of young children and then afterwards he studied under Reb Shimon, the Gemora teacher. Later he proceeded to Reb Yaakov Kopel's class, where he became an outstanding student.

Kaddish was barely sixteen years old when his father passed away. His mother, the widow Tzivia, decided that they would leave the settlement and move to Posen. Above all, she had her son Kaddish in mind, since she wanted him to study at a yeshiva there and benefit from the company of the Torah scholars for whom Posen was distinguished. She especially wanted him to be under the watchful eye of her brother in law, Reb Boruch Batlan, her late husband's brother.

Her plan was to sell the plot left to her by her husband and use the money to buy a small shop from which she could support herself and her only son. But the settlement's leaders were against this, explaining that it was not in keeping with the regulations adopted at the founding of their settlement. These regulations stipulated that the settlement's members, together with the mourners. were obligated to study and pray for the soul of the

departed member for at least the year of mourning.
Of course, Tzivia and her son would not go against the decision of the settlement's leaders, so they stayed on.
It was arranged for at least a quorum of ten men to pray and study daily in Reb Dovid's room, in keeping with the settlement's regulations.
The regulations also stipulated that widows and orphans were exempt from farming the land, and that other members of the settlement should do their work for them. Lots were cast to determine who would farm their plot through the entire year of mourning, enabling the mourners to be free to devote their time to Torah study and good deeds for the merit of the departed soul.
During that year, Kaddish continued his studies.
Since his was a special case, he was now permitted to study the Kabbalah, although he was not yet eighteen.
During the summer of that year, something remarkable happened in Artzos Ha-Chayim. Throughout the surrounding region, an extreme drought literally shriveled up everything growing in the fields and gardens. Yet in Artzos Ha-Chayim, there was enough rainfall and an abundant crop.
This only served to further reinforce everyone's conviction that the reason for this unusual phenomenon was because Kabbalists farmed the land.
The crops were so poor everywhere, that farmers in the villages and merchants in the cities and towns charged exorbitant prices for food. But the Kabbalists of Artzos HaChayim refused to raise the price of their produce

by even a penny. They could easily have made a fortune, but they were adamant in refusing to raise prices.

On top of that, they made a condition with the dealers buying their produce that they should do the same and not raise prices for their own customers. This earned the Kabbalists widespread praise.

Once the year of mourning was over, the widow and her son were permitted to sell their property and move to Posen. The settlement's regulations prohibited sale to a stranger, allowing it to be sold only to a member of the settlement or to a member's son-in-law or son.

In any case, the widow Tzivia and her son Kaddish were now able to leave the colony.

CHARIER 56

LOVE FOR CHILDREN

Rabbi Yisroel Chaim and his wife

— The pain of raising children — The "crazy one"

W

ITH the money that Reb Dovid's widow made from selling her property in the mystics' Land of Life settlement, she was able to move with her son Kaddish to Posen, ft was there that her brother in law, her late husband's brother Reb Boruch, lived.

Reb Boruch was known in the whole region as Reb Boruch "Batlan". Contrary to what his name implied, an impractical idler, Boruch was both an accomplished Torah scholar of great piety and also a wealthy merchant with wide business interests. In the world of Torah scholarship, he was considered an outstanding scholar,

while in the business world he was considered highly successful.

All in all, Reb Boruch Batlan was a man of very fine qualities with endearing ways who was loved and respected by everyone — scholar, businessman and ordinary Jew alike.

Reb Boruch welcomed his widowed sister in law and her orphaned son with love and sympathy, helping them to feel at home in their new home and community.

He introduced her to another widow and the two together set up a partnership of sewing women's clothing, thereby providing both with a respectable living.

He also enrolled his nephew Kaddish in a local ycshiva and found him a suitable study partner. In addition, he himself scheduled regular Gemora study sessions with him.

Kaddish, who had excelled in his studies both in Gemora and in Kabbalah while still in the Kabbalists' Arrues HaChayim colony, was now surprising both his Roshci Yeshiva and his uncle with his progress.

Reb Boruch was particularly impressed with his nephew because his own son Binyomin, who was a little younger than Kaddish, was far behind his orphaned cousin both in Torah studies and in character development. At the suggestion of his Rebbe, Rabbi Yoel Baal Shem of Zamoshch, Reb Boruch had sent Binyomin to study at a. yeshiva in Prague.

It was from his uncle Reb Boruch that Kaddish learned about his late father's family and also details

about other well known personalities in Posen.

Kaddish was especially impressed by a story Reb Boruch told him about Rabbi Moshe, the community leader of Posen, with whom Reb Boruch would later arrange a marriage — between his daughter Rochel and Rabbi Moshe's son, Reb Schneur Zalman.

Rabbi Moshe was a disciple of the outstanding Torah scholar, Rabbi Asher Yonason, who was known as the "Mind of Iron." The story of how he came to be known by this unusual name made a powerful impression on Kaddish when he heard it from his uncle. It taught him about phenomena that he could barely have glimpsed from Torah study alone.

In a city like Posen, so well known for its great Torah scholars and people of noble deeds. Rabbi Asher Yonason's father, Reb Yisroel Chaim, who was not very learned, should hardly have merited attention. Yet he did succeed in earning the entire city's praise for his outstanding deeds.

This was because of his great love and attention to the little children attending Torah schools, where they were educated from a tender age in the practices of Judaism. Every Friday afternoon, just before the teachers dismissed their students, Reb Yisroel Chaim used to visit all the city's Torah schools. He would give out sweets to all the children, such as honey cookies, candies, raisins and almonds, telling them that it was in honor of Shabbos. He would also remind the children not to miss coming to Shut for Shabbos evening prayers and Shabbos

morning prayers the next day.

Reb Yisroel Chaim would arrive first in Shul, where he would gather the youngsters around him and make sure they loudly responded “Amen” and "Boruch Hu Uvoruch Sh'mo" besides Kedusha and all the other parts of the prayer service that young children can repeat. He taught them how to rise up on their heels for the words "Kadosh..." in Kedusha, and how to bow their heads at Borchu, and he would recite the Shcma with them.

Whenever a woman in the city gave birth to a boy, Reb Yisroel Chaim would gather the youngsters and lead them to her home to recite the Shcma next to the newborn’s crib during the days before the child’s circumcision.

He also took care to teach the children from the earliest age to keep their heads always covered, to let their side locks grow, and to conduct themselves in general the way Jews should.

That which the children’s own parents and even Torah teachers often failed to do, Reb Yisroel Chaim used to do with great joy and love. It was clearly a pleasure and a privilege for him to be able to help Jewish children grow into good, devoted Jews.

That was as far as children who had parents were concerned. As for orphans, Reb Yisroel Chaim was like a true father to them. His wife too was deeply devoted to them, watching over them like the apple of her eye.

Unfortunately, Reb Yisroel Chaim and his wife experienced great anguish with childbearing. Whenever

she gave birth, her children did not survive for long. Neither prayers nor blessings from good Jews seemed to help, nor did various natural means that sometimes helped other couples. The children born to Reb Yisroel Chaim and his wife simply did not survive.

Nevertheless, neither of them ever complained against Gd. Every time another child passed away, they would say “Gd has given and Gd has taken away” — for surely He knows what He is doing.

One of their children, Simcha, did survive until the age of five. The parents were hopeful that he would live out his years. But Simcha too, fell ill and returned his soul to his Maker.

The tragedy occurred on a Friday, the day Reb Yisroel Chaim would normally be busy on his rounds of the Torah schools to distribute sweets to the little students tn honor of the Shabbos.

But he was not destined to make his rounds that day. Instead, he had to attend his son’s funeral.

The whole of Posen mourned with them, reaching out to their beloved Rabbi Yisroel Chaim and his wife in their time of pain. The whole community attended the funeral, from the greatest Torah scholars to the simplest Jews, with not a dry eye among them. Amazingly, only Reb Yisroel Chaim and his wife remained strong, accepting with love Gd’s will.

The entire crowd accompanied the child to his final resting place. So huge was the crowd that no one paid much attention to who was there. No one noticed an old

man, known in Posen as Asher Yonasan, mingling in the crowds. In Posen he was considered crazy and not worthy of attention. If not for the somberness of the occasion, especially such a tragic funeral that moved everyone so deeply, some would no doubt have had some fun at the crazy old man's expense.

Asher Yonasan’s age was surpassed only by his poverty. He had arrived in Posen many years ago from another land. Ever since, he had been living in the Beth Hamidrash. there he slept and ate his meals — if indeed he ate at all... No one paid him much noticed. He was known only as a man who behaved strangely, which was why he became known as "the crazy one.”

He used to pray with the earliest group for morning prayers, at the crack of dawn. Right after that, he would disappear to the Shul attic, often staying there all day. No one knew what he did there whether he was praying, reading Psalms or other books, or perhaps sleeping. Neither did anyone bother to find out, because he was anyway considered crazy.

How he managed to survive was a mystery that no one ever bothered to investigate. He did not ask anyone anything and never ate at anyone's home. In fact, no one ever invited him for a meal, not even on Shabbos or Yom Tov.

Probably this was because he avoided people, staying on his own in the attic rather than in the Beth Hamidrash among other worshippers. In fact, he never even spoke to anyone. If someone said anything to him, he would give a

surprised look and promptly turn away without a word in response.

Most likely, there was no special reason for his silence only the fact that he was crazy.

When Asher Yonasan had arrived in Posen some fifty' years earlier, he had been estimated to be about forty. That would make him about ninety at the time of this story.

During the period when he settled in Posen, the Jewish world was divided by a great controversy about Kabbalah study between certain great Torah scholars and Rabbi Eliyahu, the Baal Shem of Worms. As in other Jewish communities, Posen was split on this issue.

Of course, it did not occur to anyone in Posen chat this newcomer, Asher Yonasan, who immediately settled in the Beth Hamidrash and conducted himself so strangely — had even a remote connection with the controversy that then divided Jews into two camps, ultimately paving the way for the Chassidic movement. It was clear to everyone that this Asher Yonasan was nothing but crazy

Obviously, no one paid any attention to someone who for so long had been considered insane by the whole city even when he came down from his place in the attic to participate in the funeral of Reb Yisroel Chaim's five-year' old son Simcha, who was brought to burial on that Friday afternoon before Shabbos.

CHAPTER 57

THE TZADDIK'S CONDITION

The "crazy one" at the funeral — The remarkable condition —The Tzaddik takes his leave

Little Simcha's body was laid to rest, the huge crowd stood around his open grave weeping bitter tears for the child's parents, Reb Yisroel Chaim and his wife. Both parents remained calm, accepting G'd's judgment and declaring with firm resolve: "Gd has given and G d has taken away."

"We had hoped," they said, "that we would be privileged to escort outson to his wedding. But now Gd has decreed that we escort him to his final resting place May G d's name be blessed."

A murmur arose among the crowd. Some even questioned Gd's ways: How could such an injustice have been done to such Gd fearing Jews as Reb Yisroel Chaim and his wife? The tragedy moved everyone to the depth of their hearts.

It was at that point that old Asher Yonasan, whom everyone had always considered crazy, suddenly pushed through the crowd until he stood right next to little Simcha's open grave. With a motion of his hand, he silenced the crowd.

"My fellow Jews," he called out, "please listen carefully to what 1 have to say.

Everyone was so shocked to hear him speak that they

gave him their full attention, not wanting to miss a word. Although no one had ever paid him any attention, he nevertheless seemed to have something of significance to say.

Reb Asher Yonasan continued: “It is already some fifteen years since the Satan — may no one have anything to do with him — became envious of Reb Yisroel Chaim the storekeeper, and his virtuous conduct. Above all, he could not bear Reb Yisroel Chaim’s great devotion to the young Jewish schoolchildren, how he watched over them like the apple of his eye to guide them in the proper path. A Jew like Reb Yisroel Chaim could force the Satan out of his job, for the good deeds that Jews were doing would soon start to outweigh their sins!

“The Satan therefore came before the Heavenly Court with the request that he be permitted to put Reb Yisroel Chaim to the test by challenging him with difficult trials and tribulations to see if he would still remain so good and pious. Let him and his wife experience real anguish in bringing children into the world, for only then could it be seen whether they would keep their faith in Gd and continue to believe in His Torah.”

Reb Asher Yonasan paused briefly, as if to catch his breath. “I am now ninety four years old.” Two months from now, I will be leaving this world. When I arrive in the world of truth,’ I promise to call the Satan to a court case before the Heavenly Court for having caused Reb Yisroel Chaim and his wife such unwarranted anguish and suffering.

“1 will plead their case before the Heavenly Court and insist that G d bless them with a son who will merit long years and great talents and who will grow up to he a great Torah leader of the Jewish people.

“I make but one condition, that the son they will be blessed with shall be named after me, Asher Yonason "

As soon as the old man finished speaking, he walked away from the open grave. Everyone had been caught off guard and remained utterly amazed, uncertain of their reaction to his words. Were these the words of a deranged person or of a holy man — a hidden tzaddik?

For a long while, everyone looked at each other in silence. Reb Yisroel Chaim and his wife too, just stood there in silence. No one was able to fathom what had just occurred. Finally, the grave was filled and the mourners and crowd dispersed, going back home.

The amazing story soon spread. Everyone in the city, young and old, was talking about it. As usual in such cases, the actual facts of the story’ became richly embellished.

The city was on the verge of a split. Some contended that Reb Asher Yonasan must be a hidden tzaddik, while others maintained that he was just a crazy old man whose words could not be taken seriously. Those who had suddenly begun to believe in his hidden saintliness even started to tell of miracles he had performed and spoke of his great scholarship in Talmudic learning and in the Kabbalah.

While the commotion about him kept the city in a

state of agitation, Reb Asher Yonasan went about his daily routine exactly as before. He stayed in the attic of the Beth Hamidrash day and night, and when he did go down to the synagogue, he spoke to no one.

Reb Yisroel Chaim and his wife did believe in Reb Asher Yonasan's words. Whether out of conviction or hope, they found comfort in his promise that they would be blessed with a son. They therefore took great care not to do or say anything wrong that could cause them, Gd forbid, to lose their merit for receiving the blessing. With redoubled dedication, they increased their efforts on behalf of children, widows and orphans and the needy in general.

Reb Yisroel Chaim and his wife tried their utmost to befriend the mysterious Reb Asher Yonasan. They would have gladly invited him to live with them and provided him with all his needs, or at least bring his needs to the attic of the synagogue. But the old man ignored all their efforts and when Reb Yisroel Chaim tried to speak to him, he simply did not respond.

One day Reb Yisroel Chaim's wife waited for him in the Beth Hamidrash as he came down from the attic and she cried out:

"Reb Asher Yonasan, since you have already promised me a son, how should 1 conduct myself until I become pregnant, during pregnancy and after the birth? How do I raise my child?"

Reb Asher Yonasan turned away from her, as if he had heard nothing. Those who witnessed this scene

considered it further proof that the old man was simply deranged.

The month of Av came. One day after morning prayers, before the worshippers left the shul, Reb Asher Yonasan stood up on the Torah reading platform and in a clear voice, as if conveying good tidings, declared:

"Fellow Jews, today 1 am leaving you! Please forgive me for any disrespect 1 may have shown anyone inadvertently, or any discomfort I may have caused anyone. I also wish to thank the officers and worshippers here for allowing me to stay in the Beth Hamidrash all these years."

Concluding his little speech, he stepped down from the platform. Many assumed that he planned to leave Posen and move elsewhere.

Reb Asher Yonasan then walked to a nearby store, where he bought three candles. Having done this, he brought a small barrel and filled it with water.

When he finished, he started to pray Mincha, the afternoon prayer, earlier than usual. He prayed with deep devotion and with an evident joy — rather than sadness.

After concluding his prayers, he asked one of the Jews studying Torah in the Beth Hamidrash to go to the city's burial society and notify its chief officer that he, Reb Asher Yonasan, was in his last moments of life and that they should come quickly in order not to miss the departure of his soul!

While that Jew hurried off to fulfill his mission. Reb Asher Yonasan, still fully alert, asked another Jew there

for a favor - to light the three candles he had just bought and place them around his head after his soul departs. He asked that his body should be placed on the floor immediately after the departure of the soul and one candle should be lit at his head, another to his right and the other to his left.

While this was going on, many young men were studying in the Beth Hamidrash. Seeing Reb Asher

THELVBAVITCHER RABBI'S MEMOIRS

Yonasan busy with his own final arrangements and hearing what he told the two men, they were gripped with fear. Never had they heard or seen anything like this. Something seemed to them amiss — Reb Asher Yonasan appeared to be in perfect health, yet he was arranging for his death. Perhaps this was a further indication that he was not in his right mind?

"Why are you talking about death?" they asked him in fright.

"I ask you please not to argue with me," pleaded the old man. "There is no time to lose. Do as 1 ask, and if you fulfill all my wishes, there will still be time for me to bless you before 1 leave you."

Having said this, he started to say the confession prayer said before leaving the world. He said it in a clear voice, each word distinct and well thought out. The men in the Beth Hamidrash fell deathly quiet, their questions silenced, they obediently fulfilled all of Reb Asher Yonasan's requests.

A while passed before some members of the burial

society appeared. Reb Asher Yonasan stretched out on a bench and asked that his sack of belongings be brought to him. Out of the sack he himself took out ready-made shrouds and handed them to one of the burial society members. Again he rummaged in the sack and brought out a little bundle, which he untied, taking out three golden coins.

“Give this to the chief officer of the burial society," he said, “for the purchase of my grave and my burial expenses. My grave should be at the north edge of the cemetery next to the fence. In that rocky area it is difficult to dig graves, so the burial society won't lose much if 1 am buried there. 1 wish to lie alone, for I cannot bear the smell of other dead and the dirt of pleasure food. Please distribute the rest of my money to charity."

Reb Asher Yonasan then gathered his clothes and asked that they be sent to his relatives in Prague. He also requested that they remind Reb Yisroel Chaim and his wife to name their son after him.

He then asked forgiveness of all the Jews of Posen, and gave them all his blessing. Finally he asked that as soon as he breathes his last, he should be ritually washed with the water he had prepared and be buried that same day.

Reb Asher Yonasan then called out the words of the Shema, “Shema Yisroel Hashem Elokeinu Hashem Echod" and with a faint smile on his lips, his soul left this world.

CHAPTER 58

THE WONDER CHILD

Named after the Tzaddik — A wonder child— Parents have Nachas.

The news of Reb Asher Yonasan's extraordinary demise spread around Posen like lightning. The remarkable details — how he had made preparations for his own passing and given precise instructions about his burial — made it all the more amazing. No one any longer dared question the old man's mental state. Everyone now agreed that a tzaddik had been living among them unnoticed, a truly righteous man who did not wish to benefit from anyone else and had shunned honor and attention.

Since he had requested to be buried that same day without delay, everyone knew that the funeral would soon take place and were all anxious to be present and honor this great tzaddik. Shopkeepers closed their stores and workers set aside their work. Teachers dismissed their students early and housewives stopped their housework. Everyone, young and old, streamed to the Beth Hamidrash where the old tzaddik had passed away.

Before his soul's departure, Reb Asher Yonasan had instructed those around him to remind Reb Yisroel Chaim and his wife about the condition he had made with them. His instructions brought back memories of that fateful day at the cemetery — when all were gathered at the heartbreaking burial of their little son Simcha, at which

time the old man had announced that the couple would he blessed with another son who would merit long life if they would name him Asher Yonasan. Many had already forgotten about it, or had dismissed it then as foolish talk. Now, however, their realization added to the town's sorrow and regret. If they had neglected to give this saintly man his due respect during his lifetime, at least now they were anxious to rectify their wrong and honor him after his passing.

Crowds filled the streets around the Beth Hamidrash from where Reb Asher Yonasan's funeral was to start. From the size of the crowd, it seemed that not a soul was left in any of the homes in Posen.

Deep in grief and with profound reverence, the crowd followed the body to the cemetery. Just as the procession reached the cemetery, heavy clouds darkened the skies, especially to the east. A rainbow appeared in all its splendid colors, and then, just as suddenly, a thunderstorm struck. Lightning tore through the clouds with blinding flashes, followed by thunder that pounded through the atmosphere with a deafening roar.

The crowd was terrified. They took it as a sure sign that Reb Asher Yonasan was highly regarded in Heaven and that this was the way he was being greeted as he passed from this world to the next.

The grave had been prepared in accordance with his request before his passing. Once his body was lowered into the grave and covered with earth, it was time for the Kaddish prayer to be recited for his soul. But who would

recite Kaddish for him? He had no family here and no one dared come forward to offer to recite Kaddish for such a great tzaddik.

Suddenly, out of the crowd stepped the “one-eyed carpenter,” as he was known in Posen. No one knew his real name, nor had anyone been interested in finding out. Although he had been living in Posen for fifteen years, he was still considered an outsider. One of his eyes was permanently closed, so he was called the “one eyed carpenter,” a name that had stuck ever since. No one had ever taken much interest in him. He bothered no one and neither did anyone bother him.

Emerging from the crowd without a word, the carpenter approached the grave and started reciting the Kaddish.

During the next eleven months of mourning, he continued to recite Kaddish at all the daily prayers. Occasionally, he would go to the lectern in the "Poalei Tzedek” Shul — where the ordinary workers prayed — and lead the prayers as mourners usually do.

Nobody asked him about his connection with the departed Reb Asher Yonasan, nor did he volunteer information. It all seemed to be purely coincidental that he was reciting Kaddish for him.

Meanwhile, something else happened that caused a stir in town. A few months after Reb Asher Yonasan’s passing, Reb Yisroel Chaim the shopkeeper heard from his wile that she was pregnant. At first, both kept it secret to avoid an evil eye. But of course it did not take long for the

secret to get out and the whole city was abuzz with the good news.

Everyone realized the connection between the good news and the blessing of the tzaddik, Reb Asher Yonasan. and so everyone eagerly awaited the outcome.

Just a year after Reb Asher Yonasan's passing, Reb Yisroel Chaim's wife gave birth to a normal, healthy boy. Reb Yisroel Chaim immediately arranged for young cheder students to come and recite "Shema" at the infant's bedside. At his circumcision on the eighth day, the boy was given the name Asher Yonasan, after the tzaddik who had foretold his birth.

The child was strong and in excellent health. His parents were overjoyed, yet somewhat apprehensive, for, after all their trials and tribulations, who knows what might happen? In their hearts, however, they had implicit faith in the blessing of the departed tzaddik.

At the age of eight, Asher Yonasan was so strong that he looked like a boy of twelve. He also spoke in a clear voice and was highly gifted. By the time he turned ten, he had already completed the course of studies at the yeshiva for junior students where his parents had sent him. The yeshiva's dean advised his father to let Asher Yonasan continue studying on his own.

Before long, everyone in Posen realized that the young boy was an llluy — a youthful prodigy. He impressed everyone with his Torah erudition and sharp mind.

The time had now come for the young genius to fulfill

his heart's desire — to study at the great Yeshivos of that era, under the leadership of the Torah giants of the generation. The yeshivos of Poland and Lithuania had an outstanding reputation in the whole Jewish world.

He shared his desire with his father, who agreed to let his son get acquainted with the world of Torah scholarship

Actually, Reb Yisroel Chaim had another reason for letting him go. The boy would soon be turning thirteen and the Jews of Posen were preparing to use the occasion of his Bar Mitzva to shower Reb Yisroel Chaim with great honor. This he certainly did not wish.

In addition, Reb Yisroel Chaim was still fearful that an evil eye might harm his exceptionally handsome, healthy, and brilliant son, whose scholarship held the whole city spellbound and whose reputation had spread to other cities and towns, and even other lands.

One day, Posen was shocked to hear that the brilliant Asher Yonasan had left town. When his parents were asked where he had gone, they replied that they too had no idea. All they knew was that he had set out to seek a center of Torah study and would continue wandering in exile lor a while as was customary at the time.

For six years Asher Yonasan wandered about on his self imposed exile, visiting many Yeshivos, among them the renow ned academics of Prague, Cracow, Lublin and Brisk He also visited the great Torah giants of Germany and Poland.

After the six years, he returned home to Posen. Reb

Yisroel Chaim arranged a match for him with the daughter of one of the wealthiest men in town. His father' in law agreed to support the young couple indefinitely so that the brilliant young scholar could continue his studies.

Now everyone called him Rabbi Asher Yonasan. giving him the honor befitting a scholar of such stature

For ten years, he studied Torah without interruption, day and night, in the Beth Hamidrash that his father in law had built for him next to his home. Occasionally, he would allow other great scholars, old and young, to come and discuss matters of learning with him, since many had questions they were eager for him to explain.

Rabbi Asher Yonasan had but one fault — he looked down on all the great Torah scholars of his time, speaking belittlingly of them, for he considered himself more learned and brilliant than they.

Many believed this to be no exaggeration, for Rabbi Asher Yonasan’s brilliance seemed boundless and his grasp and memory had no match. He recalled everything he had ever learned, seen or heard since the age of two! He even remembered what he had learned in his early childhood from Reb Yosef Yisroel the ”cymbalist." This learned neighbor of his parents used to recite to him verses and even whole chapters from the Scriptures, which little Asher Yonasan would promptly repeat by heart. It was then that Posen's Jews started realizing his amazing talents, forecasting that he would become a great Torah leader.

This Reb Yosef Yisroel the cymbalist was a rare personality. Although known as the "cymbalist.' he was not a musician by profession as one might have thought He was indeed an extraordinarily accomplished cymbals player but he used his rare talent only at weddings, where he would play to fulfill the obligation of gladdening the hearts of the newlyweds. Thus did he acquire his reputation.

Normally, Reb Yosef Yisroel did not socialize, yet when there was a wedding, he suddenly became a most sociable person.

He was actually a goldsmith by profession, but not an ordinary goldsmith by any means. He had an outstanding talent in creating exquisitely beautiful jewelry, especially gold and silver ornaments on which he engraved all sorts of amazing pictures. Consequently, his artistic creations were in high demand. He had learned his craft from his father, who had been just as famous for his artistic work in gold and silver

As distinguished as he was as a goldsmith, so was he as a Torah scholar He knew the entire Scriptures by heart as well as all six orders of the Mishnah and many tractates of the Talmud. While he worked, he would review those texts by heart, continually memorizing more and advancing in his knowledge.

Noticing Asher Yonasan's prodigious memory as a child, Reb Yosef Yisroel would often repeat Scriptural verses and chapters to him. Amazingly, the youngster absorbed them all and never forgot them.

Now that Rabbi Asher Yonasan was sitting and learning and being supported by his wealthy father-in law so that he could study undisturbed, he acquired many volumes and manuscripts on all Torah subjects. He needed to read them no more than once to retain them in his memory permanently

CHAPTER 59

MASTER AND DISCIPLE

Capable community leader — The Jewish delegation — Rabbi Moshe is fearless.

Rabbi Asher Yonasan's brilliance knew no bounds. Every year on the eve of Shovuos, the holiday commemorating the giving of the Torah, he would celebrate anew his completion of the entire Babylonian and Jerusalem Talmud — a rare and prodigious accomplishment. He "devoured" many other Torah works as well. However, he was among those who opposed the approach of the Kabbalists.

At the suggestion of learned community members of Posen who had sons of yeshiva age. Rabbi Asher Yonasan opened a yeshiva for outstanding students, where he gave profound lectures.

That is how the future head of the Posen Jewish community, Rabbi Moshe —grandfather of Boruch, father of the founder of Chabad Chassidus — became a student of Rabbi Asher Yonasan. Following his master's philosophy. Rabbi Moshe became an opponent of Kabbalah study.

This did not deter him however, from joining his family through marriage with Reb Boruch Batlan. who was openly a follower of Rabbi Yoel Baal Shem of Zamoshch, head of the mystics. Rabbi Moshe was later to arrange a match for his scholarly son, Schneur Zalman, with Reb Boruch's daughter Rochel, who was herself very learned How this came about will soon be related.

Rabbi Moshe, just like his teacher Rabbi Asher Yonasan, ”devoured” everything he learned, Torah as well as worldly studies As we already know, he was fluent in many languages, a talent that served him well in the prominent role he was to play as Posen’s Jewish community leader

Rabbi Moshe was only thirty five years old when he was appointed community leader As head of such a large and prestigious community. Rabbi Moshe's talents soon became apparent — especially in his struggle against the anti Semitic clergy who continually sought to persecute the Jews, stooping to the most outrageous libels and falsifications

Thanks to his stately appearance and great talents. Rabbi Moshe evoked the respect and love of Jews and non Jews alike. His extensive business interests and communal activities brought him in contact with the highest ranks of the nobility and clergy — who treated him with great respect and were quite enchanted by him. Even anu Semites had a begrudging admiration for him. His business interests required him to travel to many lands, such as Italy, Germany and Poland. He thus became

very cosmopolitan, acquiring a broad acquaintance with various people, cultures and lands — to the extent that whoever spoke with him was fascinated by his limitless lountain of know ledge. The wide extent of his knowledge was matched by his exceptional humility and fine qualities of character.

Because Rabbi Moshe traveled on business through many lands, where he came in contact with prominent personalities, both Jewish and non Jewish, he became well known internationally. It is fair to say that he was better known abroad than in his native Posen where, due to his modesty and humility, many could hardly imagine that he was so knowledgeable in both Torah and secular wisdo וח.

The day did come, however, when everyone in Posen soon came to appreciate Rabbi Moshe and his accomplishments. It happened when one of the leading Catholic priests, a rabid anti Semite who considered himself at the peak of power because he was related to the Pope, sought to deal the Jews a blow.

His intention was nor so much to harm them as to squeeze money out of them. He knew well that as soon as Jews sense an impending calamity, they immediately bring a “gift" to appease their enemies. He was also aware of a special fund set up by the Posen Jewish community for such eventualities, to finance bribes for Jew baiters when they sought to stir up trouble.

But what he was unaware of was that this fund no longer existed. As soon as Rabbi Moshe had become head

of the community, he had liquidated the fund. With the approval of the seven elected officers of the Jewish community, he had used the money to establish a vocational school for reaching the town's children useful crafts with which they could later earn a living.

But of course that was of no concern to the anti Semitic priest. He was certain that when the Jews would get kicked, they would manage to come up with the money one way or another.

As soon as Rabbi Moshe got wind of the impending calamity, he lost no time in meeting the situation head on which caught the clergy by surprise. He sent word to the bishop that he had been appointed by the Jewish community to lead a special delegation to meet with the leading clergy Rabbi Moshe therefore requested an appointment for the meeting

It had already become clear that the priests did not want merely to start up with the Jews but had actually prepared a well planned plot for a false libel against them.

This most unusual move of Rabbi Moshe — his written demand for the priests to meet with the Jewish delegation — surprised his adversaries. What was usually the case in such a situation was that as soon as the Jewish community learned of an impending calamity, they would quickly drop off a handsome gift to appease the anti Semites and the whole affair was kept quiet.

In this case, however, a formal letter had arrived from the community leader, written in perfect Polish, demanding a meeting with the clergymen — as if there

were any deals to be made with or claims to be heard from the Jews. In spite of the unusual nature of the request, the archbishop suggested that Rabbi Moshe's request be granted and that an appointment be made for meeting with the Jewish delegation.

If a Jewish delegation was to be received, of course it had to be done with the utmost pomp and ceremony — in the great palace next to the ancient cathedral and in the presence of all priests and invited guests from the high ranking Catholic aristocracy. First and foremost, the Jews had to be shown whom they were expected to respect. Besides, the Church wanted to show off its glory as well, as its magnanimity in condescending to give ear to the lowly Jews.

When the appointed day and houtarrived for the Jewish delegation to come. Rabbi Moshe entered the palace with two of his colleagues. They were greeted with respect — as if to show that the clergy treated even Jews politely and correctly — and were shown to their places up front.

They were addressed by one of the leading priests:

"Surely you must be aware of the grave ctime the Jews have committed against outreligion. The figurine of our deity was torn off the crucifix at the town center and slung into a dung heap. Such a scandal has never happened in outcity and we cannot permit it to be tolerated."

Rabbi Moshe replied: "Of course we have heard what happened to the cross. None of us however, knows for a

fact that it was done by a Jew. This is precisely why we are here — to ascertain what it is that outenemies base their claim on. It is well known that Jews are careful not to disparage symbols held sacred by other religions."

Rabbi Moshe spoke not only clearly, Butalso firmly and confidently. Those anti Semites had never heard such words from a Jew. Not only that, but they were also impressed with the fluency with which Rabbi Moshe spoke their language.

Clearly this was no ordinary' Jew hut one who knew how' to make a deep impression on his audience' For a tew moments, the priests sat perplexed, not knowing what to answer, their eyes glued to Rabbi Moshe.

Suddenly, one of the younger priests sprang to his feet, his face aflame with rage and his eyes bloodshot. In a violent temper he roared:

“What proof do we need for such a disgraceful act by the Jews? It is brazen audacity for this so-called Jewish leader to come here and tell us not only that the Jews are innocent and have no need to atone for their ctime by offering an appropriate sum of money as expiation, but actually to demand from us evidence — as if the fact that outsacred symbol was lying in dung and filth is not enough. Such insolence can come only from Jews, who crucified outgod!”

The two communal representatives accompanying Rabbi Moshe became unnerved. Such an outburst from a young priest could ignite a fire of unbridled violence among those present, which would bode evil for all the

Jews.

Rabbi Moshe, however, remained calm. A faint, ironic smile crossed his lips. He remained calm even as the rest of the priests, stirred up by their young colleague's outburst, began to get really angry. Among themselves they started to agree that the Jews were indeed really dangerous: Soon they would attack a church and profane Chrisrian sacraments. It seemed high time to teach the Jews a lesson.

At this point Rabbi Moshe rose to his full height, and in a ringing voice called them to task:

Be silent, wild men! Why are you so unruly?"

His authoritative voice and ringing tone overawed everyone present and the priests fell silent

Rabbi Moshe now directed his words to the archbishop, who, being related to thePope, spoke Italian

In clear and fluent Italian, the Jewish community leader admonished him:

"Shame on the hunter who cannot control his hounds.'

I am fully aware what these anti-Semites are after — to squeeze money out of us. Let it be known, then, that we have no intention of offering any bribes, because the accusation is utterly false. No Jews have had anything to do with this ctime .

CHAPTER 60

THE PROUD JEW

Anti Semitism. The real culprit — Families from opposing factions unite

through their children.

Rabbi Moshe, head of the Jewish community of Posen, thought that his categorical denial of the priests' accusation that the Jews had desecrated the figurine of their deity would be sufficient. He assumed that once the priests realized they could not squeeze money out of the Jews, as he had made very clear to them, they would surely give up their ludicrous libel that the Jews had committed sacrilege.

To ensure that the priests made no mistake and understood they were dealing with a proud Jew who was standing up for his rights and refused to be intimidated by libelous accusations, Rabbi Moshe threw another bombshell He declared that there existed detailed documented records of all bribe money that the Jews had paid the Church over the years to appease them. The documents were very detailed and clear and were being held lor security purposes somewhere outside Posen. This was intended as a warning to the priests: If necessary, those documents could be shown to the right quarters as evidence revealing the priests' corruption and proving that their sole interest was to receive bribe money, that their libelous accusations were fabricated for the sake of squeezing money out of the Jews.

Rabbi Moshe, however, was mistaken in his assumption. He had not realized the extent of the priests' sheer audacity in ignoring his serious warning

The young priest who had previously burst into a

violent temper sprang again to his feet with wild screams, poured venom on the Jews:

“What outrageous audacity for the Jews to feign innocence!” he ranted. “The only way to show them who's in charge is to attack them and beat them mercilessly, to confiscate their property by force. There's no other language they understand!”

Swinging his fist at the Jewish leaders, he screamed in violent rage: “Youtheads will be the first to roll when Gd fearing Christians wreak their vengeance on the Jews for the sacrilege they have committed against outholiest symbols.”

His bitter hostility to the Jews whetted the appetite of the other priests and they too started to threaten the Jewish delegation: “We’ll slaughter you like sheep!” they screamed. “Not a brick of youthomes will be left standing when we’ve finished.”

To show the Jewish leaders that these were no mere threats, the priests started hurling abuse and screaming curses at them:

“Get out of here immediately if you don't want to become outfirst victims!”

Some of the younger priests were already advancing on the Jewish leaders with raised fists, ready to for the attack. It seemed that nothing could hold them back Just then, the bishop ordered them to desist and even started berating them sharply for their disgraceful behavior and poor example.

This gave Rabbi Moshe the opportunity he needed to

be heard again:

“We have not come here to debate religious issues,” he said with a steady voice. “It so happens that I once did have a debate with one of the cardinals in Rome. I explained that no believer can be won over by force, but only by knowledge and intellect. The Pope himself agreed with me.”

These words, which the priests knew to be true, had a deep effect. Rabbi Moshe continued:

“There is no need to repeat that it is against our Jewish convictions to desecrate symbols held sacred by other religions. But 1 do wish to repeat that the Pope himself conceded that 1 was right. He was present when 1 debated the cardinal, afterwards extending his hand to me and promising me protection wherever I may be.”

As confirmation, Rabbi Moshe took a letter from his pocket and showed it to the bishop. It was written by a cardinal in the Pope's name, and praised Rabbi Moshe for the wisdom and learning he had displayed in defending his faith.

The assembled clergy were overawed. This was no ordinary Jew.

“1 have in mind now,” continued Rabbi Moshe “to travel to Rome and appeal directly to the Pope to bring an end to all the libels constantly aimed at the Jews of Poland and Bohemia.”

After a brief pause, he added: “If you truly wish to bring to justice the one who desecrated yourcrucifix, he stands right here before you?”

He pointed at the young priest who had exploded at the Jews: “Here he is? Bring him to justice!"

After dropping that bombshell, he took leave of the bishop and left the room, followed by his two colleagues. After they emerged from the meeting, Rabbi Moshe made his companions promise to reveal to no one what had happened there.

Within a few days, everything had calmed down. The nonJews no longer spoke of their accusation that rhe Jews had desecrated their sacred symbol and the Jews no longer felt any reason for fear.

The Jews of Posen were pleasantly surprised. They were eager to find out what had transpired. From the delegates, however, they got no information. All they could learn was that it was thanks to Rabbi Moshe’s proud and resolute stand that they had been saved from a catastrophe.

Rabbi Moshe and his wife Sarah had three sons and a daughter. Their daughter Freida was the oldest, followed by Avraham and Yaakov, and their youngest son Schneur Zalman.

They commissioned the best teachers for their sons’ education, who filled them to the brim with Torah. But their daughter Freida received a minimal education She was barely taught to read Hebrew so that she would be able to pray and recite Psalms.

This was in keeping with Rabbi Moshe's opinion that girls should not be taught Torah. As we know, this was the exact opposite of the viewpoint of the mystics and

Kabbalists.

Rabbi Moshe himself had been raised in the spirit of those opposing the Kabbalah and he raised his own children in the same spirit. However, over time the situation in Posen changed markedly.

The followers of Rabbi Yoel Baal Shem of Zamoshch in Posen increased in number. This was largely due to the influence of Reb Boruch Batlan, whose nickname “Batlan” was actually a far cry from his remarkable personality. Not only was he a great Torah scholar but also a successful businessman. In fact, in both these areas he was very much like Rabbi Moshe.

Howcvcr much Rabbi Moshe was opposed to Rabbi Yoel Baal Shcm Tov’s followers, he respected Reb Boruch and consequently, his opposition to the mystics was somewhat weakened. Nevertheless, he always tried to keep his sons from associating with followers of the Kabbalah.

As closely as Rabbi Moshe monitored his sons, he could not prevent them from befriending two boys of similar age who were inclined towards the Kabbalists’ viewpoint. One boy was Binyomin, Reb Boruch’s son, and the other was his nephew Kaddish, the orphaned son of his brother Reb Dovid. Both were well known in Posen lor being unusually gifted.

It would have made no sense for Rabbi Moshe, who valued 1 orah scholars so much, to prevent his sons from associating with Binyomin and Kaddish. Besides, there were other reasons that brought these two very different

families together.

Rabbi Moshe's wife Sarah was a very kind woman. She devoted herself to the poor and the impoverished at large and befriended those with access to the poor of the community so as to know who is in need of help Sarah was especially close with the widow Tzivia, Kaddish's mother, not paying attention to the fact that Tzivia's late husband was widely known as a Kabbalist and follower of Rabbi Yoel Baal Shem. Tzivia had her own thriving sewing business, which brought her in contact with many women. She thus always knew which families were in need of support.

Sarah valued Tzivia like a gem. Besides, Tzivia was learned and truly pious and the two became very close. Of course, both were well acquainted with each other's family. Sarah knew all about Tzivia's talented son Kaddish, and Tzivia knew all about Sarah's only daughter Freida.

It so happened that Freida herself showed an inclination for the ways of the Kabbalists and mystics. Although she was from such a wealthy family, she decided that since she was not being taught Torah, she ought to learn a craft and she chose sewing.

At that time, under Rabbi Moshe's leadership, the Posen community had established a trade school to teach poor girls, especially orphans, crafts so that they could provide for themselves.

Freida made up her mind to learn a handicraft as well. Neither of her parents objected, although many

respectable members of the community considered it beneath the dignity of a girl from such a wealthy home to do so. Following Freida's example, other daughters of wealthy and prominent families also started to take up crafts, especially sewing.

Through her sewing work, Freida later became close with the widow Tzivia, who had become a seamstress to support herself and her scholarly son Kaddish.

Freida also became friends with Rochel, daughter of Reb Boruch Batlan. Like other Kabbalists, Reb Boruch was of the opinion that girls may and should be taught Torah. Rochel, in no small measure due to her unusual abilities, therefore grew up well learned in Torah. In addition, she wished to learn a handicraft. That is how she came to know Freida, who was far less learned.

These two young girls brought their families together, despite the fact that the heads of the families. Rabbi Moshe and Reb Boruch Batlan, belonged to opposing camps.

Rochel and Freida spent much time in each other's company. From Freida, Rochel heard much about her younger brother Schneur Zalman, while Freida, in turn, heard much from Rochel about her brother Binyomin and her cousin Kaddish.

Divine providence was to determine that Rochel would get married to Schneur Zalman, and Freida to Kaddish. The two families, so ideologically distant, became united through the marriage of their children.

But all this did nothing to shake Rabbi Moshe from

his opposition to the Kabbalah

CHAPTER 61

TWO MATCHES ARE MADE

Rabbi Yona Shmuel's assiduity - Kaddish wins the debate

— Rabbi Moshe selects the most outstanding student as his son in law

— Reb Boruch Batlan's unusual match.

It was at that time that the elderly Torah scholar.
Rabbi Yona Shmuel the Porush, fell ill. Everyone was talking about it because he was well known and beloved in Posen. He had been a friend of the great Torah scholar Rabbi Asher Yonasan, under whom Rabbi Moshe, Posen's Jewish community leader, had studied.
Rabbi Yona Shmuel was distinguished not for being particularly gifted Butfor his unmatched diligence in Torah study. From childhood, he had studied continuously day and night, never uttering an irrelevant word nor wasting even a moment. Already then, while still a boy, people had admiringly given him the name ¯the Porush."
In his old age, he moved out of his home altogether, staying permanently in the Beth Hamidrash on "the Portuguese street" — where descendants of Sefardic exiles such as Reb Boruch Batlan lived. He had never left that Beth Hamidrash since.
When he became ill and could no longer stand, he was invited to stay in a private home where he would have a comfortable bed and good care. But he would not

hear of it. Instead, he lay on a bench in one of the side rooms of the Beth Hamidrash antechamber, attended by the young men who studied there.

Even in this condition, stretched out sick on a bench, Rabbi Yona Shmuel did not cease studying. Gradually however, as he grew weaker, he could no longer study with his usual diligence. This wasted time caused him great pain.

He therefore asked that one of the young scholars studying in the Beth Hamidrash should study next to his bench so that he would at least be “within the fourcubits of Halacha”

Among the young men who used to study at that Beth Hamidrash were Kaddish and his cousin Binyomin, Reb Boruch Batlan’s son. All the students took turns, each one having his time for studying next to the elderly scholar so that he would always hear the sound of Torah.

Rabbi Yona Shmuel was not satisfied merely to hear them studying. He carefully followed every subject of study and invariably had his own insight to contribute. He would repeat profound questions and answers that he had heard many years before from his own Torah teacher, which gave immense pleasure to the young students.

Often Rabbi Yona Shmuel received distinguished visitors, who came to fulfill the Torah duty of visiting the sick. Among them was the community leader Rabbi Moshe. These visitors enjoyed hearing Rabbi Yona Shmuel repeat his Torah insights to the young students studying before him.

On one of Rabbi Moshe's visits, he noticed the elderly scholar unusually agitated. He was debating a point with one of the students, while the others were gathered around to listen. Eager to know what they were discussing, Rabbi Moshe listened in on the debate. Everyone was amazed at Rabbi Yona Shmuel's erudition and sharp logic.

The student debating him was Kaddish. Their Torah debate lasted for three hours. Rabbi Moshe and other scholars who had come to visit the elderly scholar were also drawn into the discussion. Eventually, everyone was forced to agree that young Kaddish had won.

This was the first time Rabbi Moshe had met Kaddish. Rabbi Moshe carefully studied the nineteen year old and was deeply impressed. Never had he seen such erudition and sharp logic in someone so young, especially to the extent of prevailing over such a renowned Torah scholar as the Porush.

But what really amazed Rabbi Moshe was how Kaddish conducted himself with such composure, how he spoke with such deliberation and self control After winning his debate, he showed not an iota of pride, but went right back to his place and sat down over his Gemora, resuming his in depth study as if nothing had happened.

Rabbi Moshe was very interested in finding out more about the young man. He learned that his name was Kaddish, an orphan and a nephew of Reb Boruch Batlan.

A few days later, Rabbi Moshe came again for a visit.

Rabbi Yona Shmuel, however, was very weak and had difficulty participating in the Torah study of the student assigned to him.

Rabbi Moshe now had an additional reason to visit that Beth Hamidrash. He looked for Kaddish and saw him studying with his cousin Binyomin. The two were deeply involved in their learning and Rabbi Moshe joined in their debate. Both young men made an excellent impression on him.

He came to the Beth Hamidrash a few more times, each time engaging Kaddish and Binyomin in discussions on Torah subjects. Clearly, he was very interested in them.

Once, when Rabbi Moshe had a conversation with his wife Sarah, he broached the subject of marriage for their only daughter Freida. He had two boys to consider — Kaddish and Binyomin. Both impressed him. But he was somewhat apprehensive about Binyomin. After all, he was the son of Reb Boruch Batlan.

Rabbi Moshe was well acquainted with Reb Boruch and thought highly of him. Like Rabbi Moshe himself, Reb Boruch was one of those rare cases of Torah scholarship and wealth combined. On the other hand, he was also a follower of Rabbi Yoel Baal Shem of Zamoshch, with whose outlook Rabbi Moshe disagreed with, since in general he opposed the path of the Kabbalah. He had to consider carefully whether he could betroth his daughter to the son of someone with whom he disagreed.

But Kaddish was different. True, his late father Reb

Dovid, brother of Reb Boruch, had been a member of the Kabbalist Artzos HaChayim settlement and a follower of the Kabbalah, but not as ardent as his brother.

Rabbi Moshe was aware that Kaddish, too, was inclined to the path of the Kabbalah. Nevertheless, he preferred him, feeling that once Kaddish would be relying on his father in-law for support and would be in a different environment, he would change.

Sarah agreed with her husband that Kaddish sounded like an excellent match for their Freida. She could only add that she knew Kaddish's mother, Tzivia the seamstress, well and that she was a truly righteous woman.

"But do not think," she told her husband, 4that Kaddish will come to live with us after the wedding and that you will be able to have an influence on him. 1 have heard from his mother that he has his own way in life. He will most likely never leave his widowed mother. By the way, Tzivia makes a very good living from her sewing and she herself wouldn't agree to her son moving in with us and be supported by us."

His wife's words, however, did not change Rabbi Moshe's mind. It took but a few months for their only daughter Freida to celebrate her engagement to Trivia's only son Kaddish.

Rabbi Moshe promised a substantial dowry, but it was agreed that the young couple would live with Tzivia. Instead of providing them with room and board for many years, as was customary when the bride's father was

wealthy, Rabbi Moshe gave them a large lump sum of money for their support.

Freida, who had learned sewing, helped her mother in law in her business while Kaddish continued his Torah studies.

For a while, Kaddish continued his study partnership with his cousin Binyomin. But eventually they had to separate, when Binyomin's turn came to get married.

Many assumed that a personality as wealthy and learned as Reb Boruch Batlan, whose son was also so gifted, would seek a really special match for Binyomin — from a family both scholarly and prominent.

Binyamin's reputation had spread so far that matchmakers came knocking at his parents' door even from distant cities. Reb Boruch however, agreed to none of them First he wanted to hear what his Rebbe, Rabbi Yael Baal Shorn of Zamoshch had to say.

He made a special trip to consult with Rabbi Yoel.

His advice was to make a match for Binyomin with the daughter of one of his followers in Posen — Reb Aharon, an impoverished Torah teacher.

When word of this match spread in Posen, it created a commotion. Prominent families like Reb Boruch Batlan's just never joined in marriage with lowly teachers.

In fact, Reb Aharon was known as one of the best teachers in town. He earned, however, far less than others in his place would have earned. He could easily have accepted children from wealthy parents, who would have paid him a respectable sum for tuition. Everyone in town

knew how effectively he imbued his students not only with Torah but also with good character traits.

But Reb Aharon had his own principles. He chose to teach first and foremost the children of the poorest families, whose fathers could pay little or no tuition. Next he accepted children of those who could afford to pay, but not much. If place remained for one or two more students, only then did he agree to accept children of the wealthy.

One can only imagine the extent of Reb Aharon's extreme poverty. If not for his wife who supplemented their income by working as a midwife and as a cook for weddings, the family would have starved. As if this was not enough, Reb Aharon and his wife also had anguish in raising their children. All their children had passed away except this one daughter.

Reb Aharon was humble by nature and his goals were modest. He wished nothing more than to teach children Torah and prepare them for a life of Torah and good deeds. His humility was so great that even when his daughter became engaged to such an outstanding young man and the whole town showered him with congratulations, he accepted their wishes meekly and with a bowed head, as if nothing special had happened.

The match was the talk of the town. But there would be many more surprises to come

CHAPTER 62

THE BAAL SHEM'S REPRESENTATIVE

The representative is given the honor — Rabbi Moshe's embarrassment

— Reb Boruch Ration's sees it as good fortune.

Reb Boruch Batlan, a respected member of Posen's Jewish community and a follower of Rabbi Yoel Baal Shem of Zamoshch, was eager to show everyone that the match he had made for his son Binyomin was no ordinary one. Reb Aharon the teacher, whose daughter had become engaged to Binyomin, seemed indeed like any other teacher. But Reb Boruch wanted the engagement to be celebrated in a grandiose style.

Before the celebration however, a special representative of the Baal Shem of Zamoshch arrived in Posen. His mission was to facilitate arrangements for the celebration and to participate in the betrothal between the Baal Shem's two followers. No doubt this was another reason Reb Boruch wanted to make it an imposing affair. He prepared a great banquet, inviting the elite of Posen, including Rabbi Moshe, head of the Jewish community, who was now related to Reb Boruch by marriage.

Rabbi Aharon the teacher, father of the young lady getting engaged, was certainly one of the principals at the celebration. But in his humility, he did not want to sit at the head table. He had to be almost compelled to do so and finally agreed, though he was clearly very uncomfortable about it.

It goes without saying that the Baal Shcm's representative was also seated at the head table, an honor that made Reb Boruch very proud, as was apparent to everyone.

As is customary, Binyomin gave a learned discourse, which left all the distinguished guests in a state of wonder. Among the guests were the greatest scholars of Posen, who were amazed at Binyomin's erudition and sharp logic. All these scholars excitedly joined in the discussion, debating points he had mentioned and each revealing in the process his own deep scholarship. Reb Boruch Batlan, Reb Aharon the teacher and Rabbi Moshe all displayed profound scholarship.

The only one who did not have a word to say was the Baal Shem's representative. In fact, he did not look like much of a scholar. While everyone around him was involved in the discussion, he just sat silently, probably because he simply had been unable to grasp the deep Torah discourse he had just heard.

In general, as we know, Rabbi Moshe disagreed with Reb Boruch about Kabbalah and, naturally, did not think too highly of the Baal Shem of Zamoshch. Consequently, more than others who were present, he kept a watchful eye on the Baal Shem's representative at the table.

He found it hard to understand how Reb Boruch could be so devoted to the Baal Shem, following his advice about his children's marriage partners and giving such respect to his representative, who seemed such an ordinary person.

It could only have been at the Baal Shem's behest that Reb Boruch had made this match with Reb Aharon, Rabbi Moshe thought to himself. If so, he reasoned, Reb Boruch's match between his daughter and Rabbi Moshe's

son must also have been at the Baal Shem's behest. But how, he wondered, could the Baal Shem have approved that match when he, Rabbi Moshe, was an opponent of his?

But he had little time to think of an answer to his own question. Other occurrences around him at the table were vying for his attention.

When it was time to recite the grace after the meal, Reb Boruch gave Reb Aharon the honor of leading grace, and moved the cup of wine over to him.

Reb Aharon, however, stood up and said:

"Honored guests! I am truly no more than grass growing on a wall in comparison to the tall 'cedar of Lebanon.' It would never have occurred to me that my daughter would get married to the prodigious son of the outstanding scholar and magnate, Reb Boruch, who is of such illustrious lineage, descended from saintly ancestors who gave up their lives in martyrdom. Nor would it have occurred to Reb Boruch to make a match with such a lowly pauper, an insignificant nothing like me, Aharon the teacher. It was only because our holy Rebbe and guide, Rabbi Yoel Baal Shem of Zamoshch, directed us to join our children in marriage. Our holy teacher's words arc sacred and we are both following his directive.

"Our holy Rebbe," continued Reb Aharon, "has sent us his representative, and, as the Torah states, a representative is considered as if he were the person who sent him. Therefore, with the permission of my mcchutan. Reb Boruch, 1 wish to hand the cup of wine to the Baal

Shem's representative and honor him with leading grace '
Everyone’s gaze now turned to the Baal Shem’s representative, whose name was Reb Yehuda Zushe He clearly looked uncomfortable..
“I am not accustomed to leading grace for such a large gathering,” he said. “I need a prayer book I'm used to praying and reciting grace only from a prayer book '
This alone was enough to cause a stir among the learned and honored guests, who threw astonished glances at each other.
Soon they became even more astonished. Reb Yehuda Zushe started reciting grace from the prayer book, but his reading was like that of an utterly unlearned ignoramus who did not even know the meaning of the words he was reading. Even his pronunciation sounded like that of a coarse peasant, as one might hear from an ordinary wagon driver who knew no Torah at all.
The eminent scholars at the table, especially Rabbi Moshe, Reb Boruch’s mechutan, lowered their heads in embarrassment. Reb Moshe felt a need to console Reb Boruch. Leaning over, he whispered sympathetically in his ear how he felt his pain for the embarrassment that his Rebbe had caused him by sending such an ignorant clod to his celebration. “Couldn't your Rebbe have sent someone who would not bring shame to this joyous occasion?” he asked.
But it was obvious that Reb Boruch had no need lor his mechutan’s consolations:
“Don't worry, esteemed mechutan he reassured him.

“If my Rebbe has sent him here to us, there can be no doubt that he has selected the one most suitable for this purpose. It does not occur to me for a moment that this representative has in any way embarrassed me Gd forbid, or ruined my celebration.”

Reb Boruch felt that there was more to be said on the subject "If my Rebbe. the holy Raal Shem, would direct me to take lor my son the daughter of any unknown. 1 wouldn't hesitate for a moment and would obey. Not only I, but my wife and my son too, all feel the same way about the Baal Shem ”

“Now that he has designated Reb Aharon's fine daughter lor my son. we consider ourselves truly fortunate, for she is a really wonderful girl. Reb Aharon himself is a unique personality who has dedicated his life with true self sacrifice to spreading the Torah among our people 1 consider it a great privilege for my son to become Reb Aharon’s son in law.”

Rabbi Moshe listened to everything his mechutan had to say and was dumbfounded. He could not utter another word If Reb Boruch thought everything was just fine, who was he to comment?

Yet, if Reb Boruch accepted everything as fine, even regarding the Baal Shem’s representative, it was not only Rabbi Moshe who expressed astonishment. Even among the Baal Shem’s followers in Posen, some wondered about Reb Yehuda Zushe’s suitability as their Rebbe’s representative.

His demeanor and appearance seemed so coarse and

unrefined, like an ignoramus. If not for the letter he brought from the Baal Shem, no one would have believed that he was his representative.

Although Rabbi Moshe had received his answer, which revealed Reb Boruch's full satisfaction both with the match and with the Baal Shem's representative, this episode could not easily be forgotten He wondered whether Reb Boruch had perhaps become blind to reality and was just deceiving himself.

Now he had no choice but to speak as little as possible about the whole episode. After all, to some extent this was an embarrassment for Rabbi Moshe, too, for now he was related by marriage to Reb Boruch.

Meanwhile, preparations had begun for the wedding. Like the engagement party, expenses for the wedding, fell on Reb Boruch's shoulders. Although the bride's family would usually pay for a wedding, Reb Aharon was far too poor to be able to afford this.

If Reb Boruch had made such a grand engagement party, just imagine how the wedding would be! Indeed, it was an elaborate affair and the talk of the town for long after. Never before had so many great Torah scholars and prominent guests graced a wedding in Posen.

Rabbi Moshe, leader of the community, was once again among the most honored family members present. He well remembered what had occurred with the Baal Shem's representative at the engagement party. Nevertheless, he did not mention a word about it and just came to the wedding, though he was wondering what

would happen this time. Would the Baal Shem's representative at the wedding be the same Reb Yehuda Zushe, or would it be someone else, not such an ignoramus as he?

To his astonishment and that of many others, it was the same Reb Yehuda Zushe who came to represent the Baal Shem at the wedding. Perhaps this time Reb Boruch would take care not to put him in a situation that would reveal his ignorance.

What astonished everyone even more was that Reb Yehuda Zushe arrived at the wedding dressed not in the plain clothes he wore last time, but in garments that the Talmud describes as "Rabbinic attire" — the satin robe and Shtreimel worn in those days by Torah scholars. Had he worn his everyday ordinary attire, the type worn by ignorant Jews, he would not have attracted as much attention.

CHAPTER 63

PERSONAL AND COMMUNAL TROUBLES

The Baal Shorn's representative reveals his true self— Rabbi Moshe's son in law loses his memory — Rabbi Schneur Zalman exchanges riches for poverty

At the wedding of Reb Boruch Batlan's son Binyomin, Reb Yehuda Zushe grabbed the attention of the guests, who included the very elite of Posen. At the occasion of Binyomin's engagement party, Reb Yehuda Zushe, the representative of Rabbi

Yoel Baal Shem, had dressed and acted like an ordinary unlearned Jew. Everyone had wondered why the Baal Shem had chosen such an ignoramus to represent him at such an important event. This time however, they were shocked to see this very same representative at the wedding, wearing the clothing of a Torah scholar — a satin gown and a Shtreimel.

Everyone remembered well how the emissary of the Baal Shem had said the grace after meals at the engagement dinner. He nearly broke his teeth saying the Hebrew words, even though he was reading them from the siddur. Now, however, he was walking around among the wedding guests as if he were a Torah scholar.

Reb Boruch acted as if nothing unusual had happened in the past and greeted his Rebbe's representative with great respect, seating him at the groom's right. The guests sitting nearby, all of them great Torah scholars, were busy discussing Torah matters. But Reb Yehuda Zushe did not utter a word.

Following the wedding dinner, the groom delivered an impressive scholarly discourse, which reflected his great scholarship. As was customary, everyone waited after the groom's discourse for the learned guests to begin discussing and dissecting the topics which Binyamin had touched upon.

But before anyone had a chance to say a word, Reb Yehuda Zushe asked Reb Boruch and Reb Aharon, fathers of the bride and groom, for permission to speak. He began with questions on Binyamin's discourse. Then, to

everyone’s astonishment, he proceeded to answer them! Reb Yehuda Zushe’s questions revealed broad erudition and depth of scholarship, while his solutions certainly amazed everyone present, reflecting a high level of scholarship that no one would have imagined.

It was obvious to everyone that Reb Yehuda Zushe was not the ignoramus they had originally taken him for. He surely had every right to be wearing his Rabbinic garb. Even more surprising was how clearly he spoke while delivering his scholarly presentation — a far cry from his unpolished pronunciation of Hebrew at the engagement party, when he had sounded like an ordinary wagon driver.

Rabbi Moshe, leader of the Posen Jewish community, and the other learned guests, looked at each other in astonishment, unable to believe what they were seeing and hearing. Now these learned guests had plenty of scholarly subjects to discuss — not only the points explained by the groom, but also those explained by Reb Yehuda Zushe.

Rabbi Moshe asked Reb Boruch’s forgiveness for having so underestimated the Baal Shem's emissary at the engagement party, taking him for an ignoramus. His opinion then had been that the Baal Shem had brought embarrassment and disgrace on Reh Boruch by sending such a person to represent him. By now Rabbi Moshe understood that Rabbi Yoel Baal Shem’s followers walk a different path. They do not reveal their true talents at all times or in all places.

The Jews of Posen and the surrounding region had what to talk about for a long time to come. The fact that Reb Yehuda Zushe showed himself to be a great scholar and especially the manner in which he did it, was a revelation to all. Rabbi Moshe and many others who had always opposed the Baal Shem and his followers, started to relate to them with increasing respect.

For two years, Binyomin and his wife, Reb Aharon's daughter, were supported by his father while he pursued his Torah studies. He then accepted the position of Rabbi of Horodna (Grodno), a city renowned for its great Torah scholars. His reputation spread throughout Poland, Lithuania and beyond.

Rabbi Moshe's connection with Reb Boruch had become even stronger when his youngest son Schneur Zalman married Reb Boruch's learned daughter Rochel. and his daughter Freida married Reb Boruch's nephew. Kaddish, a young prodigy renowned for his scholarship. Years later, a tragedy struck Reb Kaddish At the age of thirty-five, he suddenly fell very ill and for a long time lay in a coma. It took many months of prayer and other efforts on his behalf until Reb Kaddish was finally out of danger. But he was left so weakened that he did not even have strength to speak.

Unfortunately, his memory, too, had weakened to the point where he had forgotten his learning. He could not even recall the simplest blessings such as those recited before eating food. When he finally recovered enough to get out of bed, his memory had not yet returned. He had

to read his prayers and even recite blessings from a prayer book.

Because of his condition, his doctors forbade Reb Kaddish to read any Torah books. It was a year before they allowed him to study again. Gradually, he took up his studies, but he unfortunately never regained his original level of Torah scholarship.

By that time, his mother Tzivia had already passed away. Reb Kaddish used to often say, with great sorrow, how grateful he was to Gd that his mother, who had invested such great efforts in his Torah education, had not lived to see him forget his Torah learning. Kaddish had been his mother's source of comfort after her husband's passing and she surely would have been devastated by her son's sickness.

Although his mother was no longer alive to be upset by his condition, Kaddish still had his wife, his in laws and his uncle Reb Boruch. Naturally, his father-in-law. Rabbi Moshe, accepted responsibility for supporting his daughter Freida and her husband Reb Kaddish. For a man of his wealth, the expense was a minor concern.

On the other hand, Rabbi Moshe was deeply pained to see Reb Kaddish — once renowned for his Torah scholarship — reduced to ignorance. Once famous in the Torah world for his sharp mind, Kaddish now had difficulty studying a portion of the Chumash or a chapter of Scripture or Mishnah. A page of Gemora was completely over his head.

Besides this. Rabbi Moshe was not getting much

satisfaction from his own son, Schneur Zalman, who had become Reb Boruch Batlan's son in law. It was not Rabbi Schneur Zalman's scholarship that gave Rabbi Moshe cause for complaint; on the contrary, he had become a great scholar, surpassing his two older brothers, which made his father very happy.

But he had hoped also for his son to emulate his own example, combining Torah scholarship with worldly success. As with his two older sons, Rabbi Moshe wanted Rabbi Schneur Zalman to become a businessman. He even wanted to provide him with a large sum of money and give him guidance in doing business, looking forward to the time when he would successfully stand on his own two feet.

But this was not to be. Rabbi Schneur Zalman made it clear to his father that he was unsuited for business and not interested in it either. Nor only that, but he wanted nothing to do with the secular world. Instead he chose to become a Torah teacher.

Rabbi Moshe was shocked: "My son, a teacher? It will make you stay poor all your life!"

"I prefer," replied his son, "to be a teacher and remain poor, even lacking bread, than a wealthy businessman basking in wealth."

But Rabbi Moshe would not give up "Fine, you may be impractical and even content with your lot. But what about your wife Rochel? She s from a wealthy home and is used to having all her needs met. Your teaching won't even be able to provide her with enough bread to eat!"

Rabbi Moshe felt that this argument had hit its mark and that his son would not be able to find a satisfactory answer.

Yet Rabbi Sehneur Zalman had no trouble giving a clear answer to all his father's arguments.

"Rochel is an upright and pure soul," he explained, "I had no need to convince her. She agrees with me in everything, for she is an example of the truly righteous woman who does the will of her husband."

When Rabbi Moshe heard this from his son, he realized the futility of arguing with him. No way would he be able to persuade him to go into business. He also realized that even if his son would go into business, he would never succeed, for he simply was not cut out for it.

As long as Rabbi Moshe would be alive and wealthy, he could provide for his son. But he wondered what would happen after he passed on. Even while he was still alive, however wealthy he had been, how could he be sure he would not one day lose his fortune?

In any case, he had long felt that hard times were coming to Posen, sensing that many Jews would soon have to flee the city. However rich he was, he could never be certain that his wealth would last. Dangers threatened from all sides.

Indeed, all sorts of troubles started to befall Posen's Jewish community. For some time, in his capacity as community leader, Rabbi Moshe managed to minimize many dangers threatening the community. But there came a time a time when he had to ask: "From where will my help

come?"

CHAPTER 64

A NEW BISHOP

A new bishop and a new way to ensnare]ewish souls

The danger of assimilation — The "good" bishop shows his true colors

— Rabbi Moshe leaves Posen.

One of Rabbi Moshe’s heroic accomplishments, as we already know, was his success in standing up to and silencing the frenzied priests who had falsely accused the Jews of tearing down their holy symbol from the cross and casting it onto a dung heap. Rabbi Moshe, head of the delegation sent to defend the Jews, had succeeded with amazing self-confidence in averting the tragedy that hung over the Jews of Posen. Rut the matter was far from over. After that fateful encounter, the bishop investigated Rabbi Moshe’s accusation and ascertained that it was indeed none other than the young priest who had ranted against the Jews so much more vehemently than all his colleagues, who was responsible for that despicable act.

The senior priests could not forgive the young priest for this. Although they approved his intent — his excellent plan to frighten the Jews — yet the act of desecrating their holy symbol so shamefully was to them unforgivable. His younger colleagues, too, started to stay away from him.

Disgraced and shunned by all his colleagues, rhe

young offender decided to leave Posen for the center of Christianity in Rome.

There he made a good impression. During his eleven years there, he learned the art of oratory and successfully accomplished various special missions. Therefore, when word reached the Pope of the death of the bishop of Posen, the natural choice as his successor was none other than this gifted young priest, himself a native of Posen

When the Jews of Posen became aware of the new bishop's identity, it was reason enough to unsettle and frighten them. They could expect only the worst from such a rabid anti-Semite and no one doubted he would employ all means at his disposal to harm the Jews.

To everyone's surprise however, the new bishop began to befriend the Jews — encouraging close ties and friendship between his non-Jewish brethren and the Jews, urging them to become one.

Being a splendid orator, the new bishop exerted a great influence on the non-Jewish masses. Within a year, close friendships developed between some Jewish and non-Jewish youth. This concerned the Rabbis, community leaders and all Jews with a sense of responsibility, who well realized where this could lead.

It did not rake long before a young non Jew presented himself before the Rabbinical court of Posen with a request to convert. The chief Rabbi heading the court, together with the community leaders, rejected his request, basing their decision on the

Torah rules governing the

circumstances under which converts are accepted or

Word of this rejection spread rapidly. But it came as a shock that the clergy and Christian leaders raised a storm of protest about this decision. What audacity that the Jews had rejected a request to enter the Jewish fold!
The Jews of Posen were dumfounded. ft had never happened before that young Christians should wish to convert and that the clergy should insist that the Jews must accept them.
Most perplexed was Rabbi Moshe, head of Posen's Jewish community. He was a worldly man, well acquainted with the Christian world and the eagerness of the Catholic Church to ensnare Jewish souls. Now, suddenly, they had become anxious for Christians to join the Jewish fold, and when the Jews were unwilling to accept them, they raised a storm of protest!
He realized of course, that it must be the bishop who was behind all this. But that was precisely what surprised him all the more. Rabbi Moshe well remembered how anti Semitic this bishop had been many years before and how he had almost succeeded in bringing a catastrophe upon the Jews of Posen. He was certain the bishop had not suddenly become a friend of the Jews.
There must be some sinister motive behind his change of attitude in preaching friendship between Jews and Christians.
Yet, although Rabbi Moshe could well imagine that his true intent was for Jews eventually to convert to the

other faith, not for non Jews to convert to Judaism, he could not get to the bottom of this sinister plan. It was a complete mystery to him.

It happened at that time that Rabbi Moshe had to travel abroad for business, as he often did. He passed through Germany, France and Italy. Among other Italian cities, he visited Rome as well. As usual, he met there with prominent clergy, even in the Papal palace of the Vatican, where he used to discuss issues of faith in addition to general world matters.

He found an opportunity to inquire there about the motives behind the bishop’s policy of fostering friendship with the Jews. Rabbi Moshe made no secret of the Jews concern about this. What, in effect, did the high Church officials have to say about it?

He was surprised to discover that it was nor the bishop of Posen — that one-time Jew hater — who had originated this policy, but the Vatican itself. For many years, the Catholic Church had tried with an iron hand to force Jews to convert. Ar last it had come to realise that compulsion and threats could accomplish nothing. On rhe contrary, it could only have the opposite effect. The harsher the persecution, the more determined Jews become.

Since harsh persecutions by the priests had brought no Jews closer to Christianity, the Church considered alternative plans. Their conclusion was that the way to reach Jews was by treating them as equals and without speaking against the Jewish religion. And what's more.

Christians will be told that they could enter the Jewish faith if they so wished.

The Church's sinister calculation was that even if an occasional Christian would embrace the Jewish faith the result would be that many more Jews would convert to Christianity. Jews, they now realized, could be more easily ensnared by treating them well than by threats.

Rabbi Moshe trembled with shock. At last he had discovered the diabolical plan devised by the Church. What could be done about it?

In the mean time, during Rabbi Moshe's absence, the bishop of Posen continued his sermons calling upon Christians to become close with the Jew's and even to intermarry with them. If this could be only accomplished by embracing the Jewish faith he reassured them, there was nothing wrong with it.

After the Chief Rabbi of Posen refused the Christian young man's request to convert to Judaism, a non Jewish woman applied with a similar request. In this case, too, the Chief Rabbi denied her request, finding sufficient Halachic grounds to do so.

Under such conditions, the unexpected was bound to happen. What now happened shocked the Jew's of Posen and the entire region.

In a village not far from Posen lived several Jewish families. A young man, whose parents passed away when he was young, had inherited his father's tavern. He was a total ignoramus due to the fact that his father had been a coarse villager who had never even bothered to give him a

Torah education. As he result, he couldn't even read an alef.

Alter taking over the tavern, he felt that with a wife, he could manage the business far better. He already had his eye on a certain non Jewish girl employed at the tavern, an excellent worker who knew the business well. He decided to get married to her. What about their religion? As surprising as it sounds, they agreed that each one would continue to practice his own religion When the Jews of the village tried to convince him that his decision meant, in effect, that he would he neither Jew nor gentile, he expressed dismay.

"What do you mean? 1 myself heard from the priest that Jews and non Jews may intermarry with no need to convert to the spouse's religion. I have heard that even the Rabbis have permitted it.1"

When it was explained to him that this "permission" came solely from the priests, not from the Rabbis, he refused to believe it. After reflection, however, he observed:

"And if that is the case, so what? It only proves that the priests understand practicalities."

It was already clear how far-reaching the Church's influence was as a result of its "kindness" to the Jews.

When Rabbi Moshe returned from his trip, Posen was agog. Responsible Jewish leaders were agitated, realizing that the church had set a dangerous trap in which to ensnare the Jews.

What could be done to counteract this peril?

Community leaders, Rabbis and Rabbinical court judges held meeting after meeting until they came to the conclusion that something must be done to protect Jews from a slippery descent into the Christian camp. Proclamations were issued about it to the Jewish community and later, a notice of excommunication was announced against those breaking down the tradition. boundaries between Jews and non Jews. It was explicitly forbidden for Jews to have close contacts with non Jews in areas other than business. Especially in all religious affairs, Jews were to keep their distance from the non Jewish community.

At the same time, the Jewish community protested to the Church against its policies that were leading Jews to weaken their commitment to their faith

The effect these steps had on the Jews of Posen and The surrounding region was immediate. They began to keep away from the priests. However close they were with non Jews in commerce, they moved further away Irom them socially.

The bishop of Posen realized that his whole effort to win over the Jews with kindness had been in vain and so he began to show his true colors. Having no more reason to act “nicely” to the Jews, he now revealed his original hatred.

He went to the prince of Posen to slander the Jews, again fabricating a libel that they had slandered the Christian religion. To substantiate his accusation, he gave the prince a translation of the proclamation that the

Jewish community had issued warning Jews to preserve the boundaries against socializing with non Jews.

As can be expected, to ensure the desired effect, the translation was lull of falsifications. The bishop demanded that the Jew's pay a heavy indemnity and be treated harshly in general They had already been shown enough kindness and friendship, he argued. Now it was time to show' them who was in charge.

A series of harsh decrees and persecutions began and lasted for two years — 5478-5479 (1718-1719) The Jews struggled bitterly with their enemies and tried every possible means to stabilize their existence, but to no avail.

Rabbi Moshe with his wisdom could do nothing to frustrate the vicious conspiracies of the bishop and his colleagues. He now realized that the priests intended to rob him and all of Posen's other wealthy Jews of their possessions in order to reduce them to helplessness Clearly, the longer they would let this situation continue, the worse it would become. Rabbi Moshe therefore called a meeting of all communal leaders of Posen and declared that, in his opinion, there was no choice but to leave the city.

"Each of us should salvage as much of his wealth as possible," he advised. "If you wait any longer in the hope that you may be able to salvage more, you might be bitterly disappointed. You will lose all your possessions and everything you toiled so hard to accumulate Better leave Posen as fast as possible."

Rabbi Moshe advised that these plans be carried out carefully and in total secrecy so as not to draw the attention of the Jew haters who were watching their every step.

A detailed plan was drawn up for the evacuation of the Jews from Posen. Everything would proceed in an orderly fashion. Lots would be drawn to determine who would leave first and in what order the evacuation should take place.

CHAPTER 65

JEWS FLEE FROM POSEN

Rabbi Moshe settles in Minsk and some of his family in Vitebsk

— Boruch learns about his family from strangers

— A desire to become acquainted with his grandfather.

Under Rabbi Moshe's leadership, the Posen Jewish community was remarkably organized. All communal rules enacted by the community leaders were based on the Torah concept that "all Jews are responsible for one another." In good times or bad, G d forbid, the interests of the general community were carefully preserved, and each individual was expected to submit to the needs of the community.

In this time of dire emergency for the Jews of Posen, it was realized that the best solution would be for everyone to leave the city and find refuge wherever possible. But it was absolutely necessary to avoid mass panic and a sudden stampede to leave. It had to be kept

secret that Jews were leaving and it had to be done gradually and inconspicuously.

that meant that only a few Jews could leave at a time and it had to be done in an orderly manner. Lots were therefore drawn to determine who had the right to leave first and who later. Their departure had to be in complete secrecy — on the pretext of leaving temporarily on a business trip or moving to another town as if nothing out of the ordinary was happening.

If their enemies had gotten wind of the Jews' plans to leave town, they would have tried immediately to confiscate the Jews' possessions or tax them so heavily that they would have been left with nothing.

Yet, while the Jews were careful to ensure that their possessions should not fall into the hands of their enemies, they still would not have wanted to leave their less fortunate brethren behind to suffer at the hands of their enemies.

Therefore, at a meeting convened by Rabbi Moshe, it was decided that every family leaving Posen should set aside a quarter of its wealth for the community, so that the rich would not be allowed to save themselves at the expense of the poor.

When the time came for Rabbi Moshe to leave Posen in the year 5480 (1720), he too gave the community a quarter of his possessions.

Rabbi Moshe had already chosen Minsk as his new home. In those days the city was known as an important center of commerce and what is more — for its Torah

scholarship and the wisdom of its scholars.

By this time, all of Rabbi Moshe's children were married, But not all of them were willing to settle in Minsk. The family members thus went their separate ways. His son Rabbi Schneur Zalman, who had never been interested in business, took leave of the rest of the family and together with his wife Rochel settled in Vitebsk.

In spite of his generally weak disposition. Rabbi Schneur Zalman was highly successful at reaching Torah, utilizing his energy in education instead of business. He refused to accept payment lor his Torah teaching (in accordance with many Halachic opinions that prohibit it). Nor did he accept any support from his father.

He and his wife managed to subsist оn the meager funds still remaining from the sum his father had given them after their marriage to start them off in life. Like everyone else, he had had to leave a quarter of that sum to the community of Posen before he left. With the balance, Rabbi Schneur Zalman was careful to use only the capital so as not to come even remotely close to transgressing the prohibition of receiving interest from anyone. Obviously, this compelled them to live very frugally.

His sister Freida and brother in law Reb Kaddish also settled in Vitebsk. Reb Kaddish was very close to Rabbi Schneur Zalman. As we know, Reb Kaddish had forgotten all his learning as a result of a serious illness. It took him years to accumulate new knowledge in learning, but he never regained his sharp intellect and erudition.

Rabbi Schneur Zalman always showed him great

consideration and studied with him regularly, which is why Reb Kaddish became so attached to him with all his heart and soul.

As a result of his illness, Reb Kaddish remained weak for the rest of his life. However, because he went into business, his material condition was better than that of his brother in law Rabbi Schneur Zalman.

Boruch, Rabbi Schneur Zalman's son, was hearing about most of this for the first time. All this information gave him a much clearer understanding of his grandfather Rabbi Moshe, his uncles and even his own father. He also began to understand his sister Devorah Leah, who still lived in Vitebsk, there, as we know, she had married Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak, the head of the yeshiva, who was known as the llluy of Shareye.

Soon after his Bar Mitzva at the age of thirteen. Boruch had left Vitebsk. Having been orphaned of both his parents, he felt no connection with his older sister Devorah Leah. He had never understood her nor did he listen to what she had to say. He left to travel far and wide to seek his own path in life in serving his Creator.

Boruch well remembered how, after their mother s passing, his sister gave him a manuscript written in her own hand in which she writes: "Read carefully," she had told him, "what I have written here in Yiddish. It is everything I have heard from our mother, of blessed memory. She was very learned and was well familiar with our family tree. I wrote down all that she told me so that others should know this too. Read carefully what is

written here and you will learn much."

If Boruch had heeded his sister's request, he would surely have discovered facts that later took him years to find out. He would likely have related differently to his sister and, through her, to the whole family. If that would have happened, it is possible that he might not have left Vitebsk and would have saved himself years of wandering

In those early days of his youth, however, he had rather negative feelings towards his sister. Firstly, he did not understand her well personally. Besides, she was a female. It made no difference to him that she was his sister. What had connected them, of course, had been their parents. But now that they were no longer alive, he felt nothing more in common with her

A book written in Yiddish — the spoken dialect considered suitable for reading by the ignorant only — held no significance for Boruch.

“This is written in Yiddish” he told his sister, handing her back the manuscript. “It's good reading material for women, but not for men. A man doesn't read Yiddish story books, he studies Talmud and other Torah works!”

With this, Boruch cut himself off from a flowing source that would have really opened up his eyes. He would have learned about a line of personalities dating back many generations — grandfathers and ancestors for hundreds of years. He would have learned all the events of their lives and the outlooks that dominated their lives.

It is possible that Boruch would have found an answer to many questions that bothered him. But Gd,

Who guides everything that happens, wanted him to wander through towns and villages, and on his travels to meet Reb Yitzchak Shaul, son in law of the smith of Dobromysl, who was a Chossid, and from him to learn facts that would lead him to his own grandfather, Rabbi Moshe, who now lived in Minsk.

Now Boruch considered traveling to Minsk to get to know his grandfather. His estrangement from his family was beginning to melt away as he began to know them better.

Boruch, of course, was no longer the young Bar-Mitzva boy who had left Vitebsk. Now he was a mature young man ready for marriage.

Reb Yitzchak Shaul, his mentor in Dobromysl, had his own plans for Boruch. He wanted to propose a match for him with his sister and had tried writing about it to his father, who was a follower of the Baal Shem Tov. He had not yet received a reply from his father, nor did he want to shoulder the responsibility himself and talk to

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Boruch about it. He was unaware, however, that Boruch was already almost engaged.

Boruch had worked for a while as a watchman for Reb Avraham the gardener and orchard keeper, who had had an eye on him for his own daughter Rivkah On visits to Vitebsk, Reb Avraham had already investigated Boruch's family background, becoming convinced that Boruch's distinguished lineage made him a suitable match for his daughter.

Realizing that Boruch was a young man with his own mind, Reb Avraham had approached him directly to discuss the match. Uncharacteristically however, when it came to the question of marriage, Boruch did not want to rely on his own judgment. He suggested that his married sister Devorah Leah make the decision for him.
Rabbi Avraham felt confident that he would be able to come to an agreement with Devorah Leah and her husband, the Iluy of Shareye, of whom he heard so much.
But what about Boruch himself?
Lately he hadn't been showing up at all. He had been spending his time in one town after another — albeit occupied constantly with Torah study. But he was not yet settling down. It was impossible even to know exactly where to find him. Nevertheless, Reb Avraham had faith that Boruch would sooner or later turn up and not disappear without a trace

CHAPTER 66

BORUCH MEETS HIS FAMILY

Boruch meets his family —Trusts his sister to conclude the match
The future father in law's family lineage — Yeshivos of Pinsk
— Truly an ordinary hut pious young man.

It was over three and a half years since Boruch had originally left Vitebsk before he suddenly turned up there again. He came to meet his sister Devorah Leah and her husband, the head of the yeshiva, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak. He also sought out his uncle Reb Kaddish and

aunt Freida.

They were already aware that Reb Avraham, the gardener from near Lyozhna, wanted Boruch for his daughter Rivkah. Devorah Leah was surprised to hear that Boruch, who had always kept himself so distant, now declared that he would leave it up to her, his sister, together with his aunt Freida, to decide whether the match was suitable for him. Devorah Leah now felt a great responsibility. She would have to act in place of their father and mother to make this decision for her brother. Together with her aunt Freida, Devorah Leah traveled to Lyozhna and from there to Reb Avraham's home outside the town, next to the gardens from which he earned his living.

She wanted to sec not only how Reb Avraham and his family conducted themselves but also what kind of people they were. Above all she wanted to get to know Rivkah and sec whether she was fit to become her sister in law. It did not take her long to be convinced that Rivkah was indeed a suitable match for Boruch.

Although an unlearned girl, Rivkah had a heart of gold — the type of person beloved "by Gd and her fellow beings." She was not learned because her father was among those who believed that girls should not learn Torah and that the less learned they arc the better.

For Devorah Leah, this kind of thinking was alien Her mother had been a truly scholarly woman, from whom she herself had learned how to study Torah. Ever since her wedding, Devorah Leah had been studying

Torah daily and her husband, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak, regularly taught her Talmud and the codes of Torah law. As a result, over the course of several years, she became quite a scholar.

Nevertheless, Devorah Leah did value Rivkahs simplicity. She realized that what Rivkah lacked in learning she more than compensated for by her fine character. She was further impressed when Rivkah confided in her that, despite her father's opposition, she yearned to be able to learn Torah and even study the Talmud.

Devorah Leah promised to help Rivkah with her Torah studies and began learning with her, so that she would soon be able to learn independently.

Both Devorah Leah and her aunt Freida agreed to the match. But she wanted the engagement to take place at her home in Vitebsk. So Reb Avraham, his wife Sarah and their daughter Rivkah traveled there to participate in the impressive celebration.

THE LUBAVITCHER RABBI'S MEMOIRS

Boruch had no reason to disagree with the match that his sister and aunt considered suitable for him. But he insisted that the wedding not take place too soon. He wanted at least another year during which to wander, in search of that which his heart so much desired — the right path in the service of the Creator. He therefore wanted the engagement to take place without delay, so that he could leave Vitebsk as soon as possible and resume his travels.

After he took his leave, his fiancee Rivkah remained in Vitebsk at the home of her future sister in law Devorah Leah, under whose guidance she now began her Torah studies, fulfilling her desire to learn.

As long as Boruch was away it was obviously not possible for her to get to know him better. But her father Reb Avraham did have a pretty good idea of who his future son in law was. Throughout, he had faith in Boruch's talents and righteousness.

Boruch, on the other hand, knew little about his future father in law and his fiancee. Yet Devorah Leah's husband did get the opportunity now to learn from Reb Avraham about his family and learn more about him.

Reb Avraham told him all about himself. Apparently, he epitomized the blending of Torah study with earning a livelihood. Although he was a great scholar and tzaddik, he desired to earn his living by the toil of his own hands. He had chosen gardening as his source of livelihood and truly enjoyed his work; for it was thus that he fulfilled the verse "by the sweat of your brow shall you eat bread."

Reb Avraham came from a distinguished lineage. He was the fourth generation from the great Torah scholar Rabbi Avraham Chaim, author of "Toras Chaim" and "Tyn Kedoshim."

His father, Rabbi Naftoli Hertz, descended from rhe author of "Bechor Shor," who had emigrated from Moravia to Poland in the early 17th century'. Rabbi Naftoli Hertz left yeshiva to marry the daughter of a wealthy man in Polotzk, who supported him for forty years while he

studied Torah continuously. His only regret was that he had only daughters and no sons. At the age of seventy eight, however, he remarried, and his second wife gave birth to Reb Avraham.

At the time of Avraham's Bar Mirzva, his father passed away. At his father's behest before his passing, his mother moved to Byeshcnkovitch, where Avraham learned Torah from his father's friend and great scholar. Rabbi Avraham Zev.

His widowed mother supported herself and her son from a shop she opened. She was still a young woman and later married the dean of a yeshiva. They had a son who grew up to become the well known Rabbi of a community, and a daughter, who married thegreat Torah scholar, Rabbi Arye Leib — who studied together with the Illuy of Seitz, later renowned as the Vilna Gaon

Although Reb Avraham thus had some connection, through his half-sister's husband, with the Vilna Gaon, he had also learned from his Rebbe in Byeshcnkovitch about the various Baalei Shem who had been leaders of the mystics and who paved the way for (hassidus

He thus had much to tell about the great Torah scholars and tzaddikim of old as well as those of their own day. Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak was very interested in everything Reb Avraham had to tell him.

For example, Reb Avraham told about a visit to Pinsk by Rabbi Eliyahu, the Baal Shem of Worms and founder of the Kabbalists and mystics.

Pinsk was well known for its Yeshivos. At that time

there were three Yeshivos in the city: The yeshiva named after Reb Tevel and his wife Chava Devorah, Reb Shimon'syeshiva, and “Grandma” Golda Leah’s yeshiva.
Reb Avraham told a lengthy story about Reb Tevel and Chava Devorahs yeshiva. Tevel had been a very handsome and interesting personality. Born in Kobrin, across the River Dvina from Pinsk, he had lost his mother at a young age, and his father when he was seventeen. His father had left him a fine property just outside Kobrin. The land was covered with many varieties of flowers from which bees drew nectar to produce honey. He had no fewer than a hundred and twenty beehives there, enough to make him a wealthy man indeed.
Although not learned, Tevel was a very pious young man who used to pray religiously three times a day. He was also very meticulous about setting aside a tenth of his earnings for charity. In his spare time he used to recite the whole book of Tehillim with great fervor. But he could do no more than read the words, understanding little of what he read.
From a young age, Tevel had an excellent understanding of how to run his business taking care of the beehives and honey and later selling it.
He also understood that his wealth could arouse jealousy and that it was not in his best interest that others should know how much profit he made. No one needed to get envious of him and possibly seek to harm him as a result.
But he would not conceal his profits from Gd. He

always made sure to give no less than a tenth of his earnings to charity. One problem however upset him deeply. He did not know to what cause he should donate the tenth of his profits.

Tevel was not only young and inexperienced, but also unlearned. Besides, he wanted to donate secretly so that no one would know that he was the giver. What should he do?

CHAPTER 67

THE ORPHAN GIRL

Tevel's generosity and giving charity in secret.

— Chava Devorah loses hath parents — From a bad master to a worse one.

Realizing he could not rely on himself in such a matter, Tevel sought advice. He was still too young to make his own decision on such weighty issues. Therefore he went to seek the advice of Rabbi Moshe Yaffe, the Rabbi of Pinsk, who was renowned for his great scholarship. Pinsk was a twin city to Karlin, which was close to where Tevel lived.

The Rabbi of Pinsk asked to review his financial records — of earnings and expenditures — and he himself calculated the correct amount to be tithed based on the profits. Of this tenth designated for charity, Tevel gave nine tenths to the Rabbi to distribute as he saw fit and the remaining tenth — out of the original tenth — he distributed himself.

During the next five years, Tevel became ever

wealthier. The more charity he gave, the more profit he made. He started making loans to farmers, using their produce as collateral. He succeeded in this as well and became wealthier still.

Pinsk had a yeshiva that was established forty years earlier. Rabbi Shimon, a colleague of the renowned Talmudic scholar MAHARSHAL — Rabbi Shlomo Luria headed this yeshiva. After his passing, his son Rabbi Rephoel succeeded him. When Rabbi Moshe Yaffe became Rabbi of Pinsk, he was also appointed head of the xeshixa Ail the yeshiva's students were outstanding young scholars. Most were already married, but had decided to devote themselves exclusively to Torah study for several years, leaving their wives at home. Rabbi Moshe Yaffe, head of the yeshiva, used three quarters of the funds that Tevel would give him for the support of these young men. supplying all their material needs. Thanks to Tevels generosity, the yeshiva’s fame grew and it attracted more students than ever before.

During that period, Rabbi Yehuda Leib of Puchavitch. Rabbi of Bichov in western White Russia and renowned preacher, used to visit Pinsk from time to time. His custom was to travel through towns and villages to inspire Jews in their service of the Creator. Once, when he was on a visit to Pinsk, the community leaders of Karlin approached him with a request to come give a sermon in their town as well. Rabbi Yehudah Leib agreed, and he spent a Shabbos in Karlin preaching in its Beth Hamidrash. Besides being such an eloquent speaker, he was also

very impressive-looking, which made an even greater impact on his listeners. His sermons therefore had a strong effect not only on scholarly Jews who could follow the subjects about which he spoke, but also on ordinary Jews who barely understood what he said

Tevel was among the throng of people who crowded the Beth Hamidrash in Karlin to hear Rabbi Yehuda Leib's sermon. So inspired was level by the sermon that he invited the impressive looking preacher to stay at his estate. While there, Rabbi Whuda Leib mentioned that he planned to travel to Venice to publish a work he had authored. On the spot, Tevel offered to pay both travel and publication expenses. There was just one condition that he made — that this be kept completely secret. This was Tevels way of contributing to charity, in total secrecy and with no fanfare.

But Rabbi Yehuda Leib could not keep the secret and shared it with Rabbi Moshe Yaffe, the Rabbi of Pinsk. Rabbi Moshe did not reveal what he knew about Tevel. He just nodded, commenting that yes, he too had heard about this young man who was supposed to be extremely charitable.

In every Jewish community there would always be someone appointed to care for the orphans of the community, providing them with all their needs. In Pinsk, Reb Mordechai Leib and his wife had undertaken this task.

They would support orphaned boys while they studied in Torah school until their Bar Mitzva at the age

of thirteen. Those without special aptitude for study would then be apprenticed to craftsmen who provided them with room and board until they completed learning the craft and could earn their own living.

They also supported orphaned girls until they reached a certain age. Then they would be sent to stay with families in town as maids to help with housework or to families who owned land outside the city, to help with farm work or as milkmaids. In exchange for this work they would receive room, board and clothing.

In Pinsk lived a simple but pious carpenter named Reb Yaakov. He used to pray three times daily in shut with the congregation, belonging to a special society that prayed every day at the crack of dawn He earned little and barely managed to eke out a living.

Once, while constructing a new home, a beam fell on him and broke his neck. The unfortunate man lay in agony for several weeks before passing away. Three months later, his widow gave birth to a girl and named her Chava Devorah.

When Chava Devorah was three, her mother too passed away, leaving her completely orphaned. The community placed her in the care of Reb Mordechai Leib and his wife. At the age of twelve she was sent to stay with a family in Pinsk, for whom she worked as a maid for six very difficult years.

Her employer's brother once came to Pinsk for a visit and was impressed with how well Chava Devorah worked. He owned an inn not far from Tevel's estate and

needed just such a worker for the heavy workload at the inn.

When he asked his brother to let Chava Devorah come and work for him, his brother didn't need much convincing and he promptly let her go. It obviously did not occur to him to ask the girl how she felt about the matter.

Chava Devorah was very upset. Didn't she have any say about her own life? But she kept her feelings to herself. As an orphan with no one to take up her cause, she did not want to make a laughing stock of herself.

On the other hand, she had no regrets about leaving her employer, for she had suffered plenty at his home and could not imagine that it could be any worse at his brother's place.

So she became resigned to her lot. She did ask her new employer for permission to take off a day to visit her parents' graves. But he just ridiculed her: "If you don't visit them, they'll surely come to you in your dreams," he said, forcing her into his wagon and speeding away.

For the six years of drudgery she gave to her employer in Pinsk she had received not a penny. Her room, board and clothing were supposed to be her payment. She was of course helpless to do anything about it and had in general never made a fuss.

Indeed, Chava Devorah was a quiet, pious girl. She had taught herself to read Hebrew and took care to pray three times every day. She also used to read the Chumash in Yiddish translation and would recite with great sincerity

the special Yiddish prayers composed for women. She had a very good heart too, feeling deep sympathy for anyone in need.

Her new job at the inn was not easy. Both her employer and his wife burdened her with ever more work and added insult to injury with their abusive words countless times a day. The wife was especially cruel to her, her vile tongue lashing out at the poor girl. But Chava Devorah never answered back.

First thing in the morning with the rising sun and later in the afternoon during Mincha and still later at night during Maariv, Chava Devorah would pour out her heart in prayer and with bitter tears.

Her only day of rest was Shabbos. She found herself a special place under a tree not far from the inn, where she would spend her whole day every Shabbos reciting Tehillim or reading the Chumash with its Yiddish translation.

On Shabbos she tried not to shed tears, for she knew it is forbidden to cry on that holy day. Yet inadvertently, some tears would flow even then, for her poor heart was so overburdened with all her suffering. Chava Devorah soon realized how mistaken she had been to think that conditions could not get worse than they had been under her first employer. Her second employer was far worse Besides the heavy drudgery she had to do, she was also subjected to all those insults and curses.

In addition, it pained her to see that her new employers were such ordinary, unrefined people. They acted, spoke and lived like the coarse non Jews among

whom they lived.

In the home of her previous employer, she was at least among Jews. Every Shabbos and holiday she would attend shul, listening from the ladies' section to the cantor who sang the prayers so beautifully. Often she would get to hear an inspiring sermon from a traveling preacher But here at the inn she was completely cut off from the Jewish community — having only herself for company.

She suffered greatly as a result and in her prayers she always begged the Almighty to have pity on her and liberate her from her exile

CHAPTER 68

THE SHIDDUCH

Tevel hears the cries of the orphan Chava Devorah — The Rabbi as father and matchmaker to the orphans — Tevel marries Chava Devorah — Employs a Torah scholar to teach him Torah in secret.

The orphan Chava Devorah was suffering terribly.

She had made such an awful mistake by allowing herself to be taken away from Pinsk to this inn.

Her new employers' spitefulness knew no bounds as they tortured her with untold hardships.

She had no relative or anyone else to whom she could pour out her heart or call upon for help. She had only Gd Himself, before Whom she shed torrents of tears as she prayed. Especially in summertime, she would rise with the sun and go out into the garden where, under the clear sky, she prayed with sincere devotion or recited Psalms

with great supplications. Certain that no human being was within earshot — only Gd Himself — she therefore felt comfortable pouring out her bitter heart so freely.

It so happened that Tevel's property was close to the inn. One morning, as he did daily, he was on his way to the first early prayers in the shut in Karlin.

there came to his ears the sound of a woman weeping, deep in prayer. He stopped to listen to the heartfelt words.

Tcvel wondered who it could be. It could not possibly be the innkeeper's wife, for he knew the couple to be coarse, uncouth people and most unlikely to be praying to G d with such deep fervor.

Tcvel was unaware that the innkeeper had brought out a young maid and could not have imagined that it was this maid who prayed with such heart. Not wanting to be late for prayers, he decided to investigate it on his way back from shul.

On his way home, Tevel stopped at the inn. The innkeeper was sitting there surrounded by peasants, cracking jokes with them in his uncouth, unJewish manner. Before he got a chance to discuss anything with the innkeeper, he heard the man's wife screaming abuse and vile curses at Chava Devorah:

"Listen to this, a servant a rebbetzin" she .shrieked.

"She doesn't want to do a stitch of work, she just busies herself with praying and reciting Psalms' Who ever heard of a girl praying and reciting Psalms?

"Let me catch you one more time with a prayer book,"

she warned the girl, “and I’ll break your neck. You'll get such a hiding from me that you’ll have what to remember for the rest of your life, you despicable girl ”

Tevel had nothing to ask. He realized clearly what was happening. The wretched girl stood terrified in front of her mistress, expecting her to let loose at her with her hands.

“Whoever heard of women praying altogether?“ the innkeeper’s wife was still ranting on. unwilling to calm down.

From that day on, Tevel found various excuses to visit the inn in order to observe Chava Devorah. On one occasion he even had an opportunity to get into conversation with her. It was on a Shabbos afternoon when Chava Devorah was resting outside under a tree as she usually did, reciting Psalms and Yiddish prayers said by women.

This was a chance for Tevel to speak to her without interruption and their conversation continued for most of the day. He was anxious to hear everything Chava Devorah had to tell. She had so much to tell, for this was the first time anyone was willing and interested to listen- and what is more, most sympathetically. She told him of her first job at the innkeeper's brother and then of this one, the second job, worse than the first.

Tevel now knew everything he needed and wanted to know. He again went to the great scholar Rabbi Moshe Yaffe, Rabbi of Pinsk, through whom he distributed most of his charity. He told him everything he had found out

about the orphan Chava Devorah.

He confided in the Rabbi that he admired this girl and would like to have her as his wife. He wanted to hear what the Rabbi had to say about it and what he advised.

Although Tevel admired Chava Devorah so much, one thing weighed on his mind — the fact that she was more learned than he. He himself was completely ignorant, barely able to read Hebrew yet he had such a good heart. Chava Devorah on the other hand, was fluent in reading the prayer book, reciting the Psalms and reading Yiddish.

Tevel was so generous, that if Rabbi Moshe Yaffe would have advised that Chava Devorah marry someone else, he was ready to pay her dowry and trousseau. His main concern was that the orphan girl should leave her cruel employers as soon as possible.

As soon as the Rabbi of Pinsk heard this from Tevel, he sent for the innkeeper and the orphan girl. He told the innkeeper to release the girl immediately and informed Chava Devorah that she did not have to remain in the innkeeper's employment.

Free at last from the innkeeper and his spiteful wife, Chava Devorah was now sent by the Rabbi to work for a shopkeeper in Pinsk, in whose home she also stayed. The Rabbi apparently needed more time to evaluate the young girl and to form a more definite opinion of her

Tevel did want to marry her. But was she worthy to become his wife and were the two well matched for each other? Rabbi Moshe Yaffe realized the responsibility he was accepting — especially since Tevel relied on him

completely. Now he had to be father to both Tevel and Chava Devorah, for neither of them had parents.

A few weeks later, after having a chance to scrutinize Chava Devorah's conduct, habits and personality, he sent for Tevel.

"With the help of Gd," the Rabbi said, "I have come to the conclusion that Chava Devorah is the right match for you."

Tevel was delighted "You surely know, Rabbi, that 1 am in favor of this. Please find out now whether Chava Devorah is also agreeable.'

The Rabbi sent for Chava Devorah and told her that Tevel wished to marry her She naturally agreed to the proposal, and the engagement document was drawn up right there in the Rabbi's house and a date set for the wedding.

Besides the usual engagement agreement, Tevel insisted on a further agreement between them that, until the wedding, each would have full credit for their giving of charity. After the wedding however, the two would share the spiritual credit of all their good deeds as equal partners — half for him and half for her.

Tevel wanted Chava Devorah to be his full partner in life, in affairs of both this world and the next. He even signed over his entire fortune — by then he had quite a hefty one — to be shared by the two as equal partners.

In order for it to be done accurately, so that Chava Devorah would get exactly half his wealth, Tevel left all the bookkeeping to the Rabbi, relying on his judgment in

giving Chava Devorah her full half. Chava Devorah promptly gave a fifth of her share to charity.

After the wedding they went to live on Tevel's property near Karlin. Since Tevel was so ignorant of the Torah, while Chava Devorah was somewhat more learned, she now started teaching him every day whatever she herself knew. Within a year Tevel learned how to read the weekly Torah portion of Chumash, recite Psalms and even understand some of the words of the prayers.

Chava Devorah suggested that they now hire a teacher for both of them. They soon brought out to their estate one of the young men of Rabbi Moshe Yaffe's yeshiva. Rabbi Nosson Arye with his wife, whom Chava Devorah knew well, level and Chava Devorah supported the couple very comfortably, supplying all their needs and regularly increasing their pay, so that Rabbi Nasson Arye could continue teaching them both everyday.

Over the course of fifteen years, Tevel and Chava Devorah faithfully gave the designated funds to charity through the rabbi of Pinsk — Rabbi Moshe Yaffe — who calculated the amount for them.

When Rabbi Moshe Yaffe left Pinsk, he obtained Tevel's permission to reveal to his successor, the renowned Rabbi Naftoli Katz of Prague the secret of his and his wife's generosity. From then on, their funds for charity would go through Rabbi Naftoli's hands.

During this time, Tevel had become a Torah scholar Through the guidance of his teacher. Rabbi Nosson Arve, he made great progress during those years. Chava Devorah

too became very learned. However, just as they did not want others to know about their charity, so did they want no one to know about their Torah study. As far as everyone else knew, they were just simple folk — good hearted and honest, but no more.

Over time, they were blessed with children whom they later married off. Meanwhile, they both continued to learn Torah and distribute charity, humbly and without fanfare.

From time to time, husband and wife would take trips together to the well known yeshivos of that time, such as those in Ostrohe, Brisk, Slutzk, Minsk, Vilna. Cracow and Prague. At each yeshwa they would leave donations, but always on condition of anonymity

No one knew that level and Chava Devorah had become learned, nor that they had been blessed with great wealth, a substantial part of which they donated for Torah study and charity.

For the next twenty five years. Rabbi Naftali Katz served as Rabbi of Pinsk. After he left. Rabbi Naftoli Hertz of Posen succeeded him. Rabbi Naftoli practically forced Tevel and Chava Devorah to allow him to reveal rhe secret of their charitable donations over the many years. Only then did the community realize that among them had been living a couple who were hidden tzaddikim

CHAPTER 69

THE TREASURE

The secret of Tevel's and Chava Devorah's is revealed and the yeshiva is

named after them - The second yeshiva in Pinsk is named after Reb Shimon, “finder of the treasure" — The more chanty Reb Shimon distributes, the wealthier he gets - Reb Shimon discovers a treasure.

For over forty years Tevel and his wife Chava Devorah had been supporting the yeshiva in Pinsk anonymously, without it ever becoming public knowledge. But after Rabbi Naftali Hertz of Posen became head of the yeshiva and learned how extraordinarily charitable the couple was, he insisted that their outstanding good deeds be publicized.

Rabbi Naftoli also started to investigate their family backgrounds. He discovered that Chava Devorah’s father, who had died before she was born, had been a hidden tzaddik, and the same was true of Tevet's father.

“Not only are you both so generous," he told Tevel and his wife, who by then were advanced in years, "but you also come from very distinguished lineage. Let people know of your good deeds so that they may learn to emulate your example."

Tevel and Chava Devorah were unwilling to agree to this unless they moved away front that region. So they sold their property and decided to move to Cracow Before they moved. Rabbi Naftoli called a meeting in the yeshiva. The yeshiva. he told them, which had gained such a great reputation in the Jewish world, had been supported all this time by Tcvel and his wife.

At the meeting it was decided that in their honor the yeshiva would from then on be called by the name of Tevel

and his wife Chava Devorah. That is how Pinsk came to have a yeshiva with such an unusual name.

A second famous yeshiva in Pinsk was named after Reb Shimon, the "finder of the treasure." This Reb Shimon was a nephew of the renowned MAHARSHAL — Rabbi Shlomo Luria. His father Reb Yisroel was a scholar and also very wealthy and extremely charitable.

Of course, with an uncle like the MAHARSHAL who headed a great yeshiva, Shimon was sent to learn at his uncle's yeshiva. Shimon, however, was not particularly gifted, and his uncle, despite his great scholarship, could do little to help him.

On the other hand, Shimon was outstanding in his religious devotion and virtuous character. From a young age he displayed a unique interest in supporting Torah study. Even as a young boy, he would save every penny he received and give it to institutions of Torah study.

This continued until Shimon became of marriageable age. His father arranged a suitable match for him with the daughter of a wealthy family of distinguished lineage in Pinsk. His father in law Reb Zalman Boruch held the government monopoly on the tax collection of salt and candles. His wedding had the privilege to be graced by the presence of his uncle, the MAHARSHAL.

Although Reb Shimon's wealthy father'in-law supported him for several years while he continued studying Torah, he began to get involved in business. He dealt in gold and silver ornaments as well as diamonds and other gems — a business he had learned from his

father. He used to bring his precious articles to the stately homes of local noblemen and landowners, earning tidy profits. Being both trustworthy and good natured. he gained entrance everywhere and acquired an excellent reputation.

When Reb Shimon started getting involved in business, he decided that since his father in law funded all his personal needs, he would donate his profits to charity. Nine tenths would go for Torah study — one third to existing Yeshivos and two thirds to establish new ones. He distributed the remaining tenth to other charitable causes.

The MAHARSHAL had an illustrious and devoted disciple, Rabbi Eliezer Shmuel, who was also a member of the family. Reb Shimon implored him to move to Pinsk and establish a yeshiva there, undertaking to support it and to provide for all of Rabbi Eliezer Shmuel's needs. Rabbi Eliezer Shmuel agreed. He moved to Pinsk and established a new yeshiva that attracted outstanding students. It was named after its benefactor. Reb Shimon. The new yeshiva was in addition to the existing yeshiva of Reb Tevel and Chava Devorah which was now called the “old yeshiva" to distinguish it from Reb Shimon's new one.

Both Yeshivos were conducted in the spirit of chose opposed to study of the Kabbalah and to the mystics. They had a great influence over the Jews of Pinsk andthe city became known for its apposition to those who

paved the way for Chassidus, which was to be revealed many years later.

Pinsk's twin city Karlin, however, which faced it across the banks of the River Dvina, was different. The Jews of Karlin were influenced by the Kabbalists and mystics, due mainly to the fact that several refugee families that had settled there after their expulsion from Spain and Portugal were all followers of the path of the Kabbalah.

While Reb Shimon was busy building up the yeshiva that carried his name, his business prospered. Every year his wealth grew. Besides funding Torah study, Reb Shimon and his wife were involved in hospitality. Their home was open to both scholars and to other guests, all of whom were welcomed graciously.

But their main aim in life was the support of Yeshivos , whether existing ones or the establishing of new ones. By the time his father in law stopped supporting him, Reb Shimon was already a wealthy magnate in his own right. From abroad he brought an outstanding craftsman who created for him an assortment of jewelry, thereby increasing his business and profits greatly. His reputation spread far and wide.

For business purposes, he had to travel through many lands — where he would inevitably visit the local Yeshivos and leave sizable donations. Once during an extended trip throughout Poland and Lithuania, Reb Shimon observed the poverty that prevailed in so many towns and villages. On his return home, he told his wife

what he had seen, how the Jews of Poland and Lithuania were thirsting for Torah hut had no money to establish and support yeshivos.

"You know, dear husband," his wife commented, “we are so rich and outbusiness is flourishing. Let us donate our entire wealth to establishing yeshivos there.’

Reb Shimon agreed, and soon yeshivos started to nourish in Poland and Lithuania. Amazingly, the more they gave for Torah study, the more profit they made. And the more they gave for yeshivos, the stronger became their desire to give more.

As they advanced in years, Reb Shimon and his wife acquired plots for their burial after a hundred and twenty years. It became their custom to visit these plots every year on Reb Shimon’s birthday, which was in the summer That day became a time of intense soul searching tor them. Visiting the cemetery', coming face to face with that small plot of land where one will lie buried after one’s time comes, naturally arouses earnest thoughts and stirrings of repentance.

The cemetery of Pinsk was located about a mile outside of town, near a small forest through which they passed on their way to and from this eternal resting place. Once, on the occasion of his birthday, Reb Shimon and his wife were walking through this forest on their way home from their annual visit to the cemetery, when he noticed a small animal digging in the earth On closer inspection, he noticed a vessel sticking out of the freshly dug up ground. He walked over and started digging, soon

uncovering a clay pitcher filled with golden coins

I HI U BA\ n CHER RABBI'S MEMOIRS

As he dug deeper, he found many such clay pitchers full of golden coins. Reb Shimon had discovered a great treasure!

'See.' he said to his wife who was looking on amazed, "G d has sent us a treasure. Don't you agree that He must have done this lor a specific purpose? He certainly could not he intending just to make us richer, when we're already blessed with such great wealth!"

"Yes, my dear husband, you arc right!" she replied. "We must dedicate this treasure for Torah. We have always been distributing large sums for the support of Torah, and now, we'll redouble our effort and give the entire worth of this new found treasure for Torah."

Reb Shimon agreed with her. They brought the treasure home, and then went to the Rabbi of the city. They authorized him to draw up for them a "contract", whereby they committed themselves to the increased spreading of Torah study through the use of this treasure. That is how Reb Shimon came to be called the "finder of the treasure." As a direct result of this treasure, hundreds of yeshivos benefited as Torah took root in many communities and in many lands.

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GOI.DA LEAH'S YESHIVA

B

ESIDES its first two yeshivos, the histories of which have already been told. Pinsk had a third yeshiva

which was named after the righteous Golda Leah

This most extraordinary’ woman was known hv many titles — “Golda Leah, the midwife.“ ¯ Golda Leah, the Grandma," and also “Golda Leah the mikvah attendant '

Her husband Zalman Hirsh was a tailor who had 1 hard time making a living, and so Golda Leah helped out by becoming a midwife. She thus came to be called “Grandma” by many people of the city, men and women young and old, since she had delivered them at birth.

In addition, Golda Leah was also an attendant at the mikvah, a service she did without pay. purelv for the sake of the mitzva. She would be at the bathhouse when the women came to immerse themselves, attending to everyone's needs — from the young married women to those already middle aged. She would take care that their immersion was done properly, as Jewish law requires.

Besides her work at the mikvah. Golda Leah also gave of herself to another mitzva. visiting the sick This he did with the help of her husband. They devoted themselves mainly to the needy — men and women — who were sick. Golda Leah did not just visit and ask the patients how they were doing, hut she also cared for their needs. Often she cooked warm food to make them feel better or heated the furnace to warm the home. When necessary, she cleaned up the house.

If the woman of the home lay sick in bed, Golda Leah took over all household responsibilities. She prepared food lor the husband and children, bathed and dressed the little ones and when necessary, took them to cheder. If a

pair of pants or a jacket needed mending, her husband Zalman Hirsh took care of it. If any other chore needed to be done, she took care of it on her own.

If a husband — the breadwinner — was sick, Golda Leah made sure that nothing was lacking in the home, neither for the patient nor for his family. She provided the patient with medicine and the rest of the family with all their needs.

That which Golda Leah could not fund from her own and her husband's meager earnings, she collected from others. Any poor people in Pinsk who became sick knew that, first Gd Himself and then Golda Leah and her husband would never let them down!

No matter how busy she was, as soon as she heard that someone somewhere was sick, she would immediately run over, pulling her husband Zalman Hirsh away from his work to help her.

"Your work can wait," she would say. “The sick take first priority.”

In the course of her duties at the mikvah, Golda Leah was not satisfied merely with helping the women with their immersion. She also told them stories of our holy matriarchs and other saintly women, inspiring them to

lead their lives in accordance with the Torah. She taught them virtuous qualities of character and how to behave towards their husbands and children, as well as towards their neighbors and others in the market place. She encouraged them to avoid quarreling and to do no harm to

any one.

“Above all, watch your tongue." she would teach them. “Don't curse each other Speak calmly, with consideration and love.”

It was thanks to Golda Leah that the women's mikvah became a different place. Instead of the women gossiping and talking slanderously about others, often quarreling over petty matters, it became almost like a Torah school where Golda Leah taught the women virtuous behavior.

Upon emerging from the mikvah, every woman received Golda Leah’s blessings. With time, women wanted above all co receive her blessings, for it was said that her blessings were always fulfilled. Whenever she blessed someone to have healthy and talented children, they indeed were blessed with such children. Women who had previously miscarried or whose children had not survived long, received Golda Leah's blessings and were fortunate to have their wishes fulfilled.

Golda Leah’s reputation grew not only in Pinsk but also in the surrounding region. Women came to her from far and near to receive her blessings. Even women who had been childless came for her blessing and after receiving it, they were blessed not only with children but also with talented children.

She never accepted a penny for all her good deeds and blessings. When women offered her money, pleading with her to accept it to make them happy, Golda Leah refused. “How could I possibly accept pay for G-d’s gift?” she

would say “Am 1 blessing you with something of mine? I only bless you that G-d should fulfill your heart’s desires, so why should I get rewarded for this? You don’t owe me any thanks altogether. Thank G-d”

Nevertheless, women would press coins into her hand, saying: “Let this be for G d.” In that ease, Golda Leah would give it for charity, mainly for the new yeshiva recently established in Pinsk.

The first two Yeshivos had been established mainly for young married men whose wives remained at home, or who lived in Pinsk supported by their fathers in law. But this new yeshiva was for young men before they got married. As a new yeshiva, it had not yet found a steady base of support. Now Golda Leah appeared like an angel from Heaven to support the yeshiva.

Golda Leah decided to accept the money women gave her, which already totaled large sums. The more her fame grew, the more money she received week by week. But she refused to use even a penny of it for herself.

Her husband’s meager earnings from tailoring, supplemented by her earnings as a midwife, had to suffice lor their own needs. In fact, for her midwifery she accepted fees only Irom families who could afford it but charged poor families nothing at all for her services.

All the money she received as a result of her blessings went straight to the yeshiva. No wonder then, that it came

G () L D A L E AH’S Y E S H I \ A H

to be known by her name as the "yeshiva of Golda Leah, the Grandma.”

Golda Leah's yeshiva grew steadily, until it became comparable to the other two Yeshivos in stature and level Around the year 5375 (1615), the great Torah scholar Rabbi Zundel was appointed to sene as its dean He too. like the heads of the other yeshivos of Pinsk, was an opponent of the Kabbalah and the news of the mystics. Pinsk was thus a center of opposition to the study of the Kabbalah. As such an important center of Jewish life, it naturally influenced neighboring cities as well. W ith its three large yeshivos, whose graduates were sent to settle surrounding communities and every Jewish enclave, its influence continued to grow.

Among Jews, a yeshiva has always held great significance. It was especially so when there were two and now three yeshivos all espousing the same opposition to the Kabbalists and mystics. The more students these three yeshivos gained, the more theyeshivos' influence grew.

Followers of the path of the Kabbalah came to regard Pinsk as a wall of steel standing in their way, a veritable stronghold of apposition. To win adherents to their philosophy, they must first win Pinsk.

It was during the lifetime of Rabbi Eliyahu Baal Shem that these three yeshivos gained fame and influence. Rabbi Eliyahu Baal Shem, who had first lived in Worms and in later years in Prague, was the father of this movement of Kabbalists and mystics - a movement which later evolved into the Chassidic movement.

Rabbi Eliyahu Baal Shem had long felt that the way

lor his philosophy of Kabbalah to make inroads in Lithuania and Poland was to first “capture" Pinsk and its three yeshivos. But this was no easy task. These three yeshivos were under the influence of eminent Torah scholars, each of whom was steadfast in his opposition. What could be done? Rabbi Eliyahu Baal Shem decided to visit Pinsk personally.

CHAPTER 70

VICTORY OYER THE OPPOSITION IN PINSK

The great scholars of Pinsk marvel at Rabbi Eliyahu Raal Shem - scholarship — His frequent guests become his disciples — Opponents' fury and struggle against the Kabbalists

Rabbi Eliyahu, known as the Baal Shem of Worms — the city where he originally became famous - was already seventy years old when he decided to visit Pinsk and pave the way there for the study of Kabbalah and eventually Chassidus, which was to follow. The long journey from Prague to Pinsk was no easy undertaking for a man of his age. Nevertheless, he let nothing stand in his way and set out on the difficult mission.

He arrived in Pinsk as an ordinary wayfarer, just one among many wandering Jews in those days. Remaining anonymous and acting like any other poor man. he went to the communal guesthouse where such poor travelers stayed.

Rabbi Eliyahu may have been able to conceal his name and fame, But he could not do so with his striking appearance. Just by looking at him, despite the ordinary clothing he wore, it was enough to see that this was no ordinary7 man.

A few guests at the communal guesthouse realized that he must be a Torah scholar In those days it was common for many outstandingly righteous personalities and great Torah scholars to wander in exile as a penance, remaining incognito. It was already taken for granted that they would not divulge their names. Even if their scholarship was recognized, their name had to remain secret.

Word reached the community leaders that an elderly man was staying at the guesthouse who seemed to be a significant scholar. This message was conveyed to the Rabbi of the city at the time. Rabbi Naftoli Katz. He selected two young scholars to investigate, instructing them to get into conversation with the guest to determine whether he was really as learned as his appearance suggested.

When a learned guest was discovered, it was customary to honor him with a public reception befitting his level of learning. Such a guest would not be permitted to stay at the communal guesthouse, but was provided with suitable accommodations in keeping with his stature.

Sometimes such a scholar might wish to remain undetected, feigning ignorance of Torah subjects. Now,

however, when the two young scholars sent by the Rabbi came to the guesthouse to start a Torah discussion with the unknown guest, Rabbi Eliyahu Baal Shem made no effort to conceal his learning. The Rabbi's two emissaries just marveled at his scholarship; no doubt he must be one of the most outstanding Torah scholars of the generation. They were unwilling to press him for his identity as it seemed obvious he was wandering in exile as a penance. They reported back to Rabbi Naftoli about the guest's great learning.

A grand welcoming ceremony was now arranged lor this special guest. When the Rabbi and other Torah scholars of Pinsk met and discussed Torah subjects with the newcomer they became even more impressed. The guest was then invited to give a Jorah lecture at one of the city's three great yeshivos, soon followed by similar invitations from the other two.

At each yeshiva. Rabbi Eliyahu suggested that first the yeshiva dean first give a lecture of his own so that he could become familiar with each dean's unique style of learning Then he would deliver his own profoundly intricate lecture. His novel Torah insights made a striking impact and all the scholars, from old to young, became quire excited.

Rabbi Eliyahu was given accommodations at the home of one of the finest families of Pinsk The house became crowded with visitors, scholars old and young, who thirsted to hear his erudite and sharp witted Torah insights.

No one dared ask him his name, nor was anyone aware of his identity — with a single exception, the Rabbi of Pinsk, Rabbi Naftoli Katz.

By the end of his third week in Pinsk, Rabbi Fhvahu already had a number of students who were drawn to him, looking up to him as their master and considering themselves his disciples. Rabbi Eliyahu seemed eager to teach students and he did so at every opportunity Soon after, he rented an apartment io receive students and lecture to them.

Before long it became obvious that Rabbi Eliyahu's approach to learning was that of the Kabbalah. The nine disciples he attracted were all former students of the Yeshivos of Pinsk, all three of which had always opposed study of the Kabbalah. Now all these students had become enthusiastic followers of the Kabbalah.

Only now did it dawn upon the deans of the yeshivas and other Torah scholars of Pinsk, who were all strong opponents of the Kabbalah, that Rabbi Eliyahu had won over many adherents to his philosophy. This angered them no end. The guest had clearly played a trick on them' coming into this bastion of opposition to the Kabbalah and walking away with followers and adherents.

Many who had fought the path of Kabbalah all their lives had been sure that this approach would never gain a foothold in Pinsk. Now it seemed as if the ground was collapsing beneath them.

Something had to be done about it. But what could they do now? The greater their fury at Rabbi Eliyahu, the

more disciples he gained. Many former students of the three famous Yeshivos of Pinsk already followed him openly and had become his strongest supporters. Rabbi Eliyahu Baal Shem was no longer alone. He had a following in Pinsk — and a strong one at that. Any campaign against him now would mean an attack upon his many disciples too.

Clearly, there was no peace in Pinsk. The arguments were heated. By now the Baal Shem's followers had enough power and resolve to stand their ground.

Two years thus passed, during which time Rabbi Eliyahu established his own yeshiva in Pinsk, where he taught his philosophy. Despite the efforts of his opponents — especially the deans of the other Yeshivos — to neutralize his impact. Rabbi Eliyahus success continued to grow as he became more renowned and gained more followers.

Rabbi Eliyahu invested special effort in selecting fifty young scholars whom he not only taught Kabbalah but also inspired and strengthened to spread the teachings of Kabbalah. These young scholars inspired hundreds of Jews to become enthusiastic followers of the Kabbalah

Among the opponents of the Kabbalah in Pinsk was a great Torah scholar named Rabbi Gavriel. Besides his Torah scholarship, he was also physically powerful — tall in stature and very strong — and a powerful speaker as well.

He started giving inflammatory speeches calling on young and old to battle against Rabbi Eliyahu and his

followers.

Rabbi Eliyahu warned his students to stay calm and not to react at all. However excited their opponents became, however much they roared and clamored, the supporters of Kabbalah should remain silent, as if it did not concern them. He warned even ordinary Jews who supported him not to get involved in any arguments if they heard abuse, they were to remain silent.

Predictably, this tactic of Rabbi Eliyahu s disciples and followers only exasperated their opponents more Why, here they were making such a commotion, cursing the followers of the Kabbalah and calling them the most disgraceful names, yet the objects of their abuse had the audacity to keep quiet! The opponents considered their lack of response an effrontery towards them — heaping insult on injury.

The opponents' rage came to a point where some of them physically attacked the Baal Shem's disciples. Their victims however, did not retaliate. The calmer they remained, the more their enraged opponents beat them.

These incidents shocked the whole city. Naturally, the opponents felt that those who had used physical violence were in the right. Rabbi Eliyahu's followers on the other hand, felt that such disgraceful acts could not be tolerated. They would of course not retaliate in kind, but they would deal with the matter through legal means, calling the culprits to a Din Torah.

The culprits however, gave them a hard time. They angrily threw the victim's summons back at them and

refused to appear with them before the Rabbinic court. They claimed that the victims had well deserved their beating.

The followers of the Kabbalah stood their ground, warning the culprits that refusing to appear before a Rabbinic court was sufficient Halachic grounds for excommunication - a most serious punishment.

By then the followers of the Kabbalah in Pinsk included many Torah scholars, householders and wealthy and influential people.

The opponents also had a strong following that could not easily be dismissed. Nevertheless, if not for the Baal Shem's admonition to his followers to refrain from responding to their opponents' attacks, and certainly not to retaliate in kind, the opponents would not have gotten off so easily.

However, the Baal Shem's followers were determined to follow through with their plan for legal action.

CHAPTER 71

THROUGH THE GENERATIONS

Rabbi Eliyahu Baal Shem leaves Pinsk.

Rabbi Eliyahu Baal Shem of Worms considered his stay in Pinsk a triumph He had managed to breach the fortress of opposition so that the city was no longer under the exclusive influence of opponents to the Kabbalah. Since he had come there for the specific purpose of teaching his opponents this lesson, the Baal

Shem felt he had accomplished his goal and was ready to return to Prague.

Pinsk in fact was by now in the midst of an all out conflict. The attack by opponents of the Kabbalah on Rabbi Eliyahu's followers had divided the city into opposing camps.

The followers of the Kabbalah who were victims of the attack were now summoning their attackers to a rabbinical court hearing.

Rabbi Eliyahu informed his followers m Pinsk in advance of his intention to leave the citv. He called a meeting and told them:

"1 don't want you to retaliate against your opponents in kind — neither physically nor verbally. 1 am against any sort of conflict. The question is ,if the other side keeps the fire of controversy burning, how will you be able to refrain from retaliating?

"My suggestion is that those who cannot stand the constant persecution by our opponents should come with me to Prague. I will accept them into my ycshiva there and support them with all their needs."

His announcement made waves throughout the city. Despite their strong opposition to the Kabbalah in Pinsk, most Jews of the town had great personal respect for this elderly, impressive looking Torah giant. Rabbi Eliyahu Baal Shem's outstanding qualities of character, his kindness, pleasant demeanor and charitable deeds, had endeared him to many of the townsfolk.

Many who found it hard to sort through the opposing

opinions whether or not the Kabbalah may be studied, still respected Rabbi Eliyahu for the remedies and medicines he prescribed for various maladies.

For this reason they were unwilling to let him leave town. Requests came from all quarters that he stay. But Rabbi Eliyahu heeded none of them, and together with twenty of his disciples he left Pinsk.

Many scholarly residents of Pinsk who had become Rabbi Eliyahu's followers during these two years, bid him an emotional farewell, also giving honor to the disciples accompanying him.

Understandably, his opponents were overjoyed that Rabbi Eliyahu had left Pinsk and they did not mind at all that he had taken twenty disciples with him.

l'H ROUGH THE GENERATIONS

What they did mind, however, was that Pinsk was not yet rid of all adherents of the Kabbalah. The Baal Shem still had many followers in Pinsk, especially among rhe younger generation. These young men now enrolled in rhe local yeshivos, and started to infuse them with a new spirit — the spirit of the Kabbalah.

At first they learned the Kabbalah in secret. As their numbers gradually grew, many students started to follow the path of the Kabbalah even though their yeshiva deans were against it. Within a few years followers of the Kabbalah in Pinsk increased even more.

In the meantime Rabbi Zundel, dean of the yeshiva passed away and was succeeded by the great scholar Rabbi Gavriel

The new yeshiva dean could not passively accept his students' interest in the Kabbalah and started a bitter campaign against the Kabbalists.

One of the devoted disciples of Rabbi Gavriel was Rabbi Avraham Zev. He was a great genius of Torah scholarship, and like his teacher, took up the fight against the Kabbalist.

Rabbi Gavriel arranged a marriage for this disciple, Rabbi Avraham Zev with the daughter of a prominent member of the community of Byeshcnkovitch

In Byeshcnkovitch, Rabbi Avraham Zeev founded a yeshiva with the aim of producing strong opponents to the Kabbalah. But he was not fully successful, for by then the Kabbalah had many adherents and Jewish communities were divided on the issue.

One of Rabbi Avraham Zev's later disciples was Reb Avraham the gardener, who was to become the father in law of Boruch — the father of Rabbi Schneur Zalman, founder of Chabad Chassidism.

Reb Avraham himself related the above historical background on his visit to Vitebsk to meet Boruch's family. But his personal background would be incomplete without the following details:

At the time that Reb Avraham's teacher Rabbi Avraham Zev was a student of Rabbi Gavriel, he had had a friend and learning partner, Yisroel Yitzchak, also a student of Rabbi Gavriel.

Rabbi Yisroel Yitzchak was of weak health but very goodhearted. Unfortunately, none of the children his wife

Rochel bore him survived, except one — his daughter Sarah. It was this Sarah whom Rabbi Avraham Zev chose as a suitable match for his disciple Reb Avraham.

Sarah was the daughter of a great Torah scholar, yet she had received a minimal education and could barely read Hebrew or a verse of Chumash. On the other hand, she had a heart of gold and was very charitable, taking after her mother in this.

From a tender age, she was trained by her mother to help the poor. Apparently though, she came to surpass even her mother's charity.

Some time before Sarah's wedding, her mother Rochel gave her for her own personal use the jewelry that she owned. Without her mother's knowledge, however, Sarah pawned the jewelry and distributed the money among the needy. It w as only some time alter her wedding that <he redeemed the jewelry.

Although Reb Avraham was to have been supported hv his father in law, he chose instead to earn his own living through gardening — with his upright wife Sarah right by his side assisting him in every way possible

Besides her duties in running the home and raising the children, Sarah also worked in the gardens and orchards that her husband rented from local landowners, taking care of the vegetables and fruits.

Both Reb Avraham and Sarah were very charitable and hospitable. As time went on, they also became wealthy.

For them, however, their greatest wealth was the

children with which Gd blessed them — four sons and two daughters. Shimon was their first born, then Daniel, a daughter Rivkah, a son Meir, another daughter Rochel. and their fourth and youngest son, Yisroel Yitzchak

Despite Reb Avraham's efforts, their sons did not grow up to be Torah scholars as their father had w anted

Their daughters were raised simply, in accordance with the belief of those who felt that women need not learn Torah, but rather should be taught virtuous character traits.

Rivkah therefore grew up to be a girl of unusually fine virtues, in whom her parents took great pride Now Reb Avraham was hoping to see much pleasure from his talented daughter by choosing for her a suitable husband He could not have wished for a better and finer partner for her than Boruch.

It was difficult getting Boruch to make any decision about this match. For a while, he was unwilling to get involved in anything so practical.

He therefore left the matter up to his sister Devorah Leah and brother in law Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak, the llluy of Shareye. Both of them, as well as their other relatives, gave their blessings for this match between Boruch and Rivkah

At the time of course, they could hardly have imagined that this union would produce a personality who would blaze a new path in Jewish life, permeated with a new spirit in the service of the Creator — the path of Chabad Chassidus — as formulated by their descendant,

the Alter Rebbe Rabbi Schneur Zalman, Baal Ha'Tanya and

founder of Chabad Chassidus.

The Humble Giant – A Brief Biography OF R' Nissan Mindel OBM

Commemorating Rabbi Nissan Mindel on his 21st yartzeit, Yud Bais Tammuz, we are honored to share a brief biography of a true giant and genius of contemporary Chabad history – who served the Frierdiker Rebbe and the Rebbe from 1938 until 1994.

Rabbi Nissan Mindel served the Rabbeim in various capacities using his eclectic talents:

– as their personal secretary, tasked with all their correspondence which he composed in four languages
(The Letter and the Spirit series – whose letters we feature here weekly- is an example of the many thousands of the Rebbe's English letters)

– as prolific writer of Chabad literature for young and old, which helped in the establishment of Chabad chassidus in America and enabled its dissemination to the world through its unprecedented educational activities. Rabbi Mindel was personally chosen by the Frierdiker Rebbe for this task " to open Chassidus to the world."

– as founding member of the three pillars upon which Chabad stands, appointed by the Rabbeim to MERKOS, MACHANEH and AGUCH.

– and finally, as emissary of the Rabbeim, sent to many dignitaries and leaders and to major national public events as their representative.

We remember and salute a true soldier of our Rabbeim – Nissan ben Bunia

(This brief biography is from the forthcoming book from NMP : Chabad in America Through the Folders of Nissan Mindel).

Rabbi Nissan Mindel sees the development of his life's events with an eye of a true thinker and philosopher, noticing the Divine providence in the path he took.

With characteristic humility, wisdom and deep faith Rabbi Mindel tells of the insight and appreciation he gradually gained for the truth of the motto he would often quote" many are the thoughts in the heart of man and the plan of Hashem will endure."

In reminiscing about his very productive, interesting and at times dramatic life, Rabbi Mindel saw the hand of Hahsem guiding him in so many ways:

I was born on the 2 nd of Nissan, 1912/5672, one of nine children to Yaakov Yitzchak and Bunia Mindel, in Riga, Latvia. My family was at one time quite well off, having had a chocolate factory, but with the Communist Revolution and the confiscation of all private businesses, we became impoverished. At a young age I quickly learned to become self sufficient. I would wake up daily at the crack of dawn and walk a great distance, rain or shine, to the next town where I tutored a young boy. This would earn me a few coins for my daily needs and only then my day at cheder would begin.

Open anti-Semitism was part of life. As a youngster, I was once accosted by a group of hooligans spewing anti-Semitic words at me. I would not let them get away with it and stood up to them the best I could. Their vicious attack left me with a permanent injury to my ear and I remained deaf in one ear, a condition I lived with for the rest of my life, after a number of unsuccessful attempts to correct it with surgery. On one occasion years later, when I asked the Frierdiker Rebbe about fasting on Tisha b'Av due to the complications brought on by this condition, the Rebbe answered that I should ask a rov, and made it a point that I ask a "kluger rov", a clever rov. I consulted with Rabbi Shmuel Levittin, who ruled that I was not to fast on Tisha b'Av beyond a half a day.

In 1927, when I was 15 years old, I learned in the Yeshivah Torah V' Derech Eretz, which incorporated both Torah and secular studies, as espoused by Rabbi Shamshom Raphael Hirsch, the great Orthodox rabbi and leader of German Jewry in the nineteenth century. This viewpoint encouraged the older students to pursue university studies in addition to a strong adherence to Torah and mitzvos and fear of Hashem. (the Frierdiker Rebbe, R' Yosef Yitzchak, opposed this viewpoint of sending students to university. Even though they would probably have a positive influence on their environment, he nevertheless considered university a spiritually dangerous place).

A recollection I have of my youth is the well known Ragatchover Rov, Rabbi Yosef Rosen, who lived in our town. I remember going once to him to ask a halachic question, if I was permitted to play chess on Shabbos. (Chess was one of my hobbies). The Gaon answered, “If one knows how to play, one may play on Shabbos”.

My first connection with Chabad started in 1928. During this time the Frierdiker Rebbe left Russia and moved to Riga, Latvia, after his release from prison on the 12/13th of Tammuz in 1927, an event which impressed me deeply. I started to participate in the farbreingens/gatherings of the Rebbe, on the 19th of Kislev and other occasions. One vivid memory I have of these occasions is of me hanging from the doorpost at one such farbreingen in a very big crowd and glancing at the holy face and eyes of the Rabbe. This glance remains seared in my mind and heart.

That year, my brother Asher was to travel to Argentina, South America and my uncle (and future father-in-law), the chossid R’ Avraham Sender Nemtzov impressed on him to have a private audience with the Rebbe before his trip. My brother agreed and I pushed myself to accompany him. I was quite awestruck, but nevertheless entered with my brother and stood behind him, in the holy presence of the Rebbe.

The Rebbe spoke with Asher, then 17 years old, and what I remember from his words was that my brother’s primary focus as he goes from one country and one environment to another is to always remember from where he comes and his essential upbringing and way of life.

My uncle and father-in-law R’ Avraham Sender Nemtzov had a great uncle, R’ Shaul Raksin who was born in Lubavitch. R’ Avraham Sender spoke with his uncle R’ Shaul in 5760 (1900) about the recently established Yeshivah Tomchei T’mimim in Lubavitch (1897) and said that he would like to visit and possibly learn there. R’ Avraham Sender was a young married man of 27 at the time that he traveled with his uncle to Lubavitch. R’ Shaul spoke with the Rebbe Rashab (R’ Shalom DovBer) on behalf of his nephew R’ Avraham Sender and asked if he could join the newly founded yeshivah. When the Rebbe Rashab was told that R’ Avraham Sender was 27 years old and married and had served in the army for four years, he did not agree to the request, saying that the yeshivah accepted only young boys.

R’ Shaul encouraged his nephew to request a private audience with the Rebbe and present his case personally. The Rebbe agreed to receive him and again explained that the yeshivah prefers to admit only young boys. The Rebbe explained this with an analogy – the young students are like young saplings that could still be easily molded and influenced, so why should we accept an older student who is like a tree already set in its direction. With all this, R’ Avraham Sender stood his ground and seeing his determination and sincerity, the Rebbe Rashab agreed, conditionally, to accept him as a student in Tomchei T’mimim. The menahel of the yeshivah was the Rebbe’s only son and successor, R’ Yoseph Yitzchak, who kept a discerning eye on his new student. Ultimately, R’ Avraham Sender excelled in his studies and proved himself one of the best students. To the extent that Rebbetzen Shterna Sarah, the Rebbe Rashab’s wife, was accustomed to asking him questions.

R’ Avraham Sender’s last private audience with the Rebbe R’ Yosef Yitzchak was in Paris. He traveled from Manchester, where he was living at the time, for the occasion, but when he arrived he was told that it was too late, the Rebbe had already retired to his room. However, when the Rebbe overheard Chassidim saying that R’ Avrahm Sender the shochet had arrived, the Rebbe immediately came out of his room and invited his chossid in for yechidus. During this private audience, the Rebbe told him – “R’ Avraham Sender, you searched for the truth, you found the truth and you are living the truth.”

In 1930 I traveled to England to continue my studies at the University of Manchester, where I completed a second master's degree in economics. My dissertation was a comparative study of the economics of Latvia and England.

I stayed in England for a few years and got married there in 1937. My focus was now on providing for my family and I therefore came into some business arrangements with an uncle who dealt in lumber from Russia. The job entailed transactions through the telephone, which I found a pleasant way to do business.

It was at this time, in 1937, that the Rebbe R' Yosef Yitzchak contacted Rabbi Chodakov, principal of Torah Im Derech Eretz , who was also the Director of Jewish Education in Latvia, a government position which afforded him numerous opportunities to be in touch with the Rebbe about chinuch matters. The Rebbe was in Latvia at the time and was asking Rabbi Chodakov to suggest one of his students who could serve in the position of secretary to the Rebbe. When my name came up, the Rebbe inquired about my background and qualifications and showed an interest. And so when my wife and I visited Riga that year, Rabbi Chodakov promptly got in touch with me to arrange a meeting and offered me the position of secretary to the Rebbe R' Yosef Yitzchak. When I found out that the Rebbe lived in Otvotzk, Poland, I replied that I had no interest to live in Poland and refused the offer. Rabbi Chodakov persisted and asked for a second meeting, at which time I replied that I cannot accept without first consulting with my wife. Rabbi Chodakov first asked that I discuss the matter with my wife and then he offered me attractive conditions, giving me the option to set my own terms as well. Being that I was not in the least interested to be in Poland, yet not wanting to offend or show disrespect to my teacher/menahel, I set extreme conditions that I was certain would not be accepted (but which were!). When I discussed the matter with my wife, her answer was that she felt that Poland was a "death trap" and she did not wish to live there. Rabbi Chodakov contacted me yet a third time, by phone this time, and suggested that I come to Poland for a month or two on a trial basis. My wife agreed with this suggestion, but she herself would return to England and wait for me there.

After the High Holidays of 1937 (5690), I joined the Rebbe in Otvotzk, Poland with the intention of staying but a couple of months, which eventually lasted much longer. I had planned to rejoin my wife in England for Pesach. During these few months I was invited to join the Rebbe's family for Purim, at which time the Rebbe himself was not home, he was at a sanatorium. At this time, the Rebbe's son-in-law, R'Shmaryahu Gurary, the Rashag, asked that I extend my stay another 6 months with a promise to advance my salary and offered to meet whatever condition I may ask for. When I asked my wife for her advice, she said that she cannot prevent me from staying, but she would continue to stay in England and wait for me there.

And so I stayed in Otvotzk. During this time, I very much wanted to learn chassidus, Tanya, yet at first I did not have particular success. I learned with the secretary of the Rebbe, the chossid R' Yechezkel/Chatche Feigin hy'd. When we got to a topic I did not understand and asked questions about it, R'Chatche would say that for the time being we will skip it and go to another topic. I was not used to this way of learning.

I stayed in Otvotzk until Rosh Chodesh Elul 1939, learning and dorming at the Tomchei T'Mimim Yeshivah. Most of my work revolved around the yeshivah, including public relations – part of which was a newspaper column I wrote entitled "The Lower Yeshivah" (Yeshivah shel Matta). The yeshivah made a strong impression on me and I felt a deep personal loss after its destruction during the holocaust. During

this period in 1939, the Rebbe R' Yosef Yitzchak had occasion to be in contact with the U.S. government officials because of his students in the yeshivah, two American boys – the Hecht brothers, R' Shlomo Zalman a'h and R' Avraham sh'y. These American boys were ordered by the American embassy to return immediately to the States, due to the precarious pre-war situation. When I asked them if they had plans to return, they simply answered that they came to Otvotzk at the directive of the Rebbe and they intend to return only at his directive. I spoke to them of my situation as well and mentioned that I needed to return to my wife in England.

On the day that I had this conversation with the Hecht brothers, I had but two weeks left on my visitor's visa and time was of the essence. Before leaving Otvotzk I had a private audience with the Rebbe, during which I explained the situation and asked permission to leave. The Rebbe agreed and even asked some detailed questions about my passport and citizenship papers and gave me his blessings.

From Otvotzk I traveled to Riga, an eight hour trip and would get a visa there for England. On the way, I stopped in Warsaw and saw that the preparations for war were growing to a critical level. In a panic, I contacted my cousin, Shimon Pasternack, whom I had asked to fill in for me in Otvotzk while I would be away, and urged him to leave Otvotzk immediately! When I got to Riga my uncle, Shimon's father, asked me why I had left Shimon in Otvotzk at such a dangerous time. Needless to say I suffered guilt pangs.

When I got to the English consulate in Riga, I heard about the bombing of Otvotzk and here I was, stuck in Latvia. This was in Elul 1939, at the outbreak of World War II. When Rabbi Chodakov heard that I was in Riga (I was stuck and could not reach England) he asked that I utilize the time and take charge of the high school class, grade 12 of the Yeshivah Torah Im Derech Eretz for the next few months. Many students at the time knew English and Rabbi Chodakov mentioned that the Rebbe wanted that chassidisher stories should be translated to the new language, English, for them. He sent me a collection of stories for translation, the first one that I translated was the well known story of the chossid and the Alter Rebbe – "Gavriel Nosseh Chein".

In the days of Chanukah 1940, Rabbi Chodakov told me in confidence that the Rebbe and his family had safely reached Riga from Poland and that the Rebbe was in a sanatorium. He asked me to work at preparing the necessary exit papers for the Rebbe and his family by contacting Washington and all other necessary agencies in Riga to secure permission to leave Riga and enter the U.S.A.

It was then that I learned of the harrowing experience of the Rebbe and his family when they found themselves in Warsaw at the outbreak of the war. Bombs were raining down around them as they tried to hide from the Nazis y'sh and find shelter in a different place every night, to avoid detection. At one point some officials came with the necessary papers and offered the Rebbe and his family transport to safety. The family members feared some trap and were suspicious but it was soon determined that these were authentic U.S. government documents. The officials escorted the Rebbe to safety with the help of the Nazis who showed them the way! This was puzzling indeed, how could the Nazis be helping Jews? They clearly did this out of fear of the Americans.

This is how the Rebbe and his family came to Riga in utmost secrecy. It was not easy getting the necessary papers, but after much effort contacting various and numerous government agencies and officials I obtained the documents. The only way for me to reach England was to first get out of mainland Europe and travel to America. I worked at acquiring visas for Rabbi Chodakov and his wife as well and they ended up traveling to the U.S. with the Rebbe.

In addition, I made efforts to secure papers for R' Mordechai Dubin and R' Shimon Yitzchak Vitenberg, two well known communal leaders and members of the Parliament of Riga. R' Mordechai would not leave Riga and his responsibilities to the community. Every day after davening lines of people would be waiting to speak with him and seek his help and R' Mordechai cared for their needs to the best of his ability. He was ultimately exiled to Siberia by the Bolsheviks. R' Shimon Yitzchak served on the board of the Yeshivah, Torah V' Derech Eretz, was a lawyer and a senator and epitomized the best of the teachings of R' Shamshon Raphael Hirsch. He too would not leave his communal responsibilities and stayed to help his fellow Jews in Latvia. He was murdered by the Nazis y'sh.

In our group that finally left Riga for America by way of Sweden there were eleven people: the Rebbe and Rebbetzen Nechamah Dina, the Rebbe's mother Rebbetzen Shterna Sarah and her nurse Manya (Rosen), the Rashag and his wife Chana and son Berka, Rabbi Chodakov and his wife, Rabbi Lieberman and myself. We traveled by plane to Sweden, as boats were no longer permitted to travel out of Riga. The plane was small with a seating capacity of 18. We came practically empty handed, except for a package of manuscripts which the Rebbe held in his holy hand the entire time. Because there were still some available seats on the plane, the Rebbbe insisted that they be filled with another seven Jews whose lives we could save. And so we did.

We landed by plane in Stockholm, Sweden and from there we took a boat to the port of Gottesberg, (?)Sweden, where we boarded the ship Dratninghalm (?), which would sail to America.

My official papers identified me as "travel assistant to the family of the Rebbe" and were valid for six months. Needless to say, due to the unforeseen developments of the war, my six month stay extended until the end of the war.

Our voyage across the Atlantic was not very comfortable to say the least, with many a stormy days. On one occasion the forceful waves caused quite an upheaval inside the ship and as a result the Rebbe was thrown off his bed. His grandson, Berka and I were summoned to help the Rebbe back to his bed (as he was wheelchair bound at the time – from the tortures he endured in the hands of the Communists due to his self sacrifice for Torah and mitzvos). In keeping with his consistent good nature and positive ways – I found the Rebbe smiling while lying on the floor. As we picked him up he reassured us that he was b'h fine and wanted to know if anyone else had fallen during this upheaval. We told him that no one was hurt and he burst out in genuine laughter, happy and relieved that everyone was fine.

We arrived in N.Y. on the 9 th of Adar II in 1940. On the very next day, the 10 th of Adar II, the Rebbe called me in and asked me with concern if I felt comfortable in my accommodations – as we were staying in the Graystone Hotel in Manhattan and my "bedroom" served as the Rebbe's study during the day. The Rebbe also spoke to me, in his fatherly way, about the need for a young man to eat at least one warm meal a day. And then he added "by the way, a number of years ago you came to me with your brother, how is he doing?" I was deeply touched by the Rebbe's concern and love.

In the year 1940/41, the Rebbe suggested that I translate the Tanya to English, an effort which was attempted numerous times in the past without success. In truth, I was somewhat taken aback that the Rebbe chose this sefer at a time when it seemed more urgent to publish educational material for the Jewish American youth (little did I realize that this too would shortly be asked of me!). It was not only the Rebbe, but also his son-in-law, the Ramash (R' Menachem Mendel Schneerson), who impressed upon me the need to translate the Tanya.

Upon his arrival in 1941 to the U.S.A., the Ramash put his efforts into matters of education as per the directives of the Rebbe, his father-in-law. It was then that the three Chabad pillars of education were established: Merkos L'Inyonei Chinuch, Machaneh Yisrael and the new Agudas Chassidei Chabad (Aguch). The three people appointed by the Rebbe to head these three organizations were the Ramash, Rabbi Chodakov and I. The Rebbe instructed that the Merkos officers (4 people) and the Merkos activities (15) should be included and listed in the back of every Chabad siddur that is printed. This is done to this day. This is how the three organizations were directed for the next 10 years. It was during this transitional decade that Lubavitch went from the limitations it experienced in Europe to the unusual expansion it has been blessed with on the welcoming shores of America.

During the year 1942, the Rebbe called me in and asked that I make efforts to recoup the many manuscripts and possessions that were left behind in Poland. The Latvian ambassador in Poland at the time had reassured the Rebbe that he would place these in safekeeping, which he did. The manuscripts thankfully were spared, but the possessions unfortunately were destroyed during the bombing. The Rebbe mentioned that there is surely a place in New York where microfilms could be made of the manuscripts which he had managed to bring with him and so would I be so kind as to take these manuscripts and transfer them onto microfilm. The Rebbe then handed me his precious bundle of manuscripts that night!

When I realized what a treasure was in my possession, I could not sleep that entire night. Among the manuscripts, I found hand written documents written by the Ramash, mafteichos/indexes, of lengthy topics on numerous Chassidic books (these were eventually published over the coming years). I found these indexes to be an invaluable help, as they opened for me a new world. With their help I was able to study various topics in chassidus. After I made microfilms of these indexes I was able to study them during my free time in the nights and thus advanced in my study of chassidus.

It was during this period that I gained an appreciation for the value of time – as I put in eighteen hours of work daily. To the point where I suffered headaches from the intense concentration and lack of sleep, not wanting to waste precious time. I went to the doctor complaining of headaches and was told that I needed to sleep at least six hours a day.

After having studied the Ramash's indexes at great length, I felt somewhat more confident and empowered to translate the Tanya. It was then that I asked the Ramash if he would help me in this endeavor and he gladly agreed to do so. Still and all, I did not want to take too much advantage of his kindness. The work of translating the Tanya, which was finally completed in 1960/61, naturally took away time from my other responsibilities.

Translating the Tanya had a profound effect on me and drew me into the inner world of chassidus. Although I was beginning to understand and appreciate chassidus Chabad, I did not yet consider myself, nor was I planning to become a Chabad chossid. The translation of the Tanya however had a tremendous influence on my work in general.

During the years 1940 through 1944 I served in my dual roles, working for Yeshivas Tomchei T'mimim under the direction of the Rashag and also working for Merkos, Machaneh and Aguch under the direction of the Ramash. By 1944, I was working exclusively for Merkos. This work I did in close proximity to the Ramash, working with him as a colleague in his office, the office which was later to become the yechidus/private audience room when he became Rebbe.

The Frierdiker Rebbe requested that I write a monthly magazine for children – something he felt was very much needed. When I asked Rabbi Chodakov where I would find the time for this, he answered "you will only be the editor." The bottom line was that I ended up doing the entire job, writing and editing. On Chanukah 1942, the first issue of the children's monthly magazine in Yiddish – Shmuessen Mitt Kinder – was published. Shortly after, we added a second monthly, Talks and Tales, in English. These two magazines which I wrote would be published every month for the next 47 years. It was a number of years later, right after the war ended, that my wife, Necha (Nettie) was able to join me in the U.S. and she became my lifelong partner in the work of the children's monthlies and other works as well. She helped with translating, proofreading and the like and with her support in general. Except for a secretary who was hired to do typing, no one, except for my very capable wife, helped me with my work. It was yet during the war that my wife began translating the Rebbe's Memoirs/Zichronos to English, at the personal request of the Rebbe. The Rebbe had penned his Memoirs in Hebrew and upon his arrival to the U.S. he asked that they be translated to Yiddish, which they were, by Mekler. These Memoirs, as they were being translated to Yiddish, were simultaneously serialized weekly in the Yiddish newspaper – Tog Morgen Jurnal. Now, the Rebbe wanted to make them available to the English speaking public as well and so asked if my wife would be so kind as to do the English translation. Since my wife was in England during the war, we had a number of telegraphic exchanges during which she agreed to undertake this most honored task. She felt truly humbled by the Rebbe's request. Many years later at the distribution of dollars (and blessings), as the Rebbe was giving my wife a dollar and yet another, he also gave her recognition for her devoted work – he thanked her and blessed her for her efforts in helping to educate tens of thousands of yiddisher children.

I very much wanted to venture out into writing on more profound topics, but Rabbi Chodakov encouraged me to continue in my successful and vital writing for the young. There is no point in changing course, he said, especially as the magazines you author so well and elegantly serve such a critical need for the spiritual well being of the children. The Ramash checked each and every issue of Talks and Tales (English) before it went to print every month (he continued to do so without fail when he became Rebbe as well) and Rabbi Chodakov checked the Shmuessen Mitt Kinder (Yiddish) every month. Over the years, material from these two monthly magazines filled many books. The five volumes of the popular Storyteller and the two volumes of My Prayer all come from these monthlies. We are planning more b'h.

It was especially in the column of Wonders of Nature/In Nature's Wonderland, which appeared every month in the two children's magazines, that I saw a great opportunity to inspire and strengthen the young in their faith and understanding of Divine providence. In light of the science being taught in those years – science such as evolution, which assaults the young of today, the importance of laying this solid foundation of faith in the Creator, cannot be overemphasized. Ultimately, in the words of the Rambam in his Laws of the Fundamentals of Torah (Hilchos Yesodei Ha'Torah), when one contemplates the creation "how numerous are Your works Hashem," and "how great are Your works Hashem" – it brings one to the love of Hashem and the fear of Hashem. In connection with this – the Frierdiker Rebbe once commented to me that he very much enjoys reading the Shmuessen Mitt Kinder and "especially when I read the Wonders of Nature column, I gain fear of Heaven from it."

In addition to my secretarial and literary duties, I was sent on numerous missions by the Frierdiker Rebbe and later by his successor, the Rebbe. In 1942 I accompanied the Rebbe on his trip to Chicago and in 1947 I was sent by him to post- war Europe on fact-finding social/education missions (France, England

and Germany). Then, in the 1950's and 60's, I was sent numerous times by the Rebbe, his successor, to Russia (for manuscripts and for the general strengthening of the spirits of our Jewish brethren behind the Iron Curtain), to South Africa (for Jewish communal matters), to the Suez Canal, Egypt (for the printing of the Tanya) and to Eretz Yisrael (for Jewish communal matters and meetings with dignitaries and political figures). During subsequent years, in the 1970's and 80's, the Rebbe sent me on missions to Washington D.C. and Albany N.Y. for conferences on education and the aging, in addition to missions to Russia – to retrieve Chabad manuscripts and books and to Eretz Yisrael – for education matters. After the sad day of Yud Shvat, 1950, (the passing/histalkus of the Frierdiker Rebbe, R' Yosef Yitzchak), there was no doubt in my mind as to who would fill the position of seventh Rebbe – "all sevenths are beloved." Whoever asked me what they should do I would suggest that they direct their questions and requests to the Ramash in the form of a pan (pidyon nefesh) – a formal note traditionally given to a Rebbe. My father-in-law, R' Avraham Sender, was the first to publically recognize and declare the Ramash – Rebbe and requested that he say a Chassidic discourse/maamar, at the farbreingen/public gathering of Yud Shvat 1951., the first yartzeit of the Frierdiker Rebbe.

Upon the ascendancy of the Ramash to the position of seventh Rebbe on the 10 th of Shvat, 1951, my duties continued as before and I continued serving as personal secretary to the Rebbe, R' Menachem Mendel, in addition to writing the two monthlies and other writings that I authored over the years and going on missions on which the Rebbe sent me.

My role as personal secretary to the Rebbe entailed coming three times a week (and sometimes even more) to the Rebbe's room to take dictation in shorthand, in answer to the personal letters which people had written to him. Dictation by the Rebbe was always in Yiddish, where the Rebbe would explain a number of points that were necessary for the answer to the letter .The Rebbe would then tell me which language the letter was to be written in – English, Hebrew, Yiddish or Russian. I would then take these points and compose the letter, which the Rebbe would then read and edit if need be before signing and having the letter mailed. This was the procedure with every letter. And so it went with official letters to dignitaries, public/communal letters in honor of a forthcoming Yom Tov or gathering such as a dinner or convention and standard letters for births, bar/bat mitzvahs and weddings. Letters were typed with two copies, one which the Rebbe instructed to be filed in the Merkos office in 770 and the second for me to keep in my files. On occasion, as the need arose, the Rebbe would contact me by phone regarding the writing of the letters.

It was years later, after much thought and having mentioned it to the Rebbe and getting his approval, that I decided to compile some of the English letters in book form, so that people would benefit from the important universal lessons and valuable insights and advice in them. And of course any name or other clue that might identify the letter writer would be excluded to maintain privacy. Thankfully, the first volume of these letters is being published under the title – Letter and Spirit, with more volumes to follow, b'h.

In retrospect, I see the hand of Hashem in the choices I was given in life and the decisions I ultimately made based on these choices. Decisions which brought me to a life dedicated to a mission far different and greater than I could have imagined and for which I feel privileged and thankful to Hashem… "Many are the thoughts in the heart of man and the plan of Hashem will endure."

Rabbi Nissan Mindel passed away on the 12 th of Tamuz 1999/5759. His soul seems to have been intrinsically connected with the Rabbeim he so humbly and ably served for close to sixty years. The

significant day of the 2nd of Nissan, the day of his birth, is the day of the Rebbe Rashab's passing and the Frierdiker Rebbe's ascendency to the position of sixth Rebbe and the auspicious day of the 12th of Tamuz, the day he passed away, is the birthday and day of liberation of the Frierdiker Rebbe.